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FIRE FEATHER ON THE LOOKOUT.

A Tale of the Caribbean Sea.

BY NED BUNTLINE,
AUTHOR OF "THE SEA BANDIT," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE FRIGATE AND THE CRUISER.

It was, to a seaman's eye, a lovely sight. A frigate, under full sail, from royals down, close-hauled by the wind, stood out from Key West, with Sand Key Light close on her starboard hand, heading west-southwest, for Havana.

The frigate had scarcely entered the Gulf when a sail was sighted, and the lieutenant of the watch, seizing the glass, scanned the craft closely.

"What does she look like, Mr. McIntosh?" asked a voice close to the lieutenant, that of the captain of the ship.

"She is a schooner, sir, low in the hull, but carrying an enormous spread of canvas. If we luff a little, we will barely cross her bows, if she keeps her course."

"Very well, sir—do it, for in these days of piracy, it is our duty to take a close look at everything afloat. Let the crew go quietly to quarters, and see the battery ready for use in

case the stranger should try to haul his wind. A half-hour will bring her in fair range of our lower deck guns!"

These were long thirty-two-pounders—twelve on a side, while on the upper deck the frigate carried eight twenty-four-pound carronades—and forward, as "chasers," two more long thirty-twos. Her crew of three hundred and fifty picked men, were as well officered as such men could be.

"Shall I not turn over the deck to Mr. Goldsborough, and take my division, captain?" asked Lieutenant McIntosh, as he saw the first lieutenant approach.

"Yes, sir. That schooner is very large, full of men, and has a hard look!" said the captain, who had taken the glass, and was closely examining the stranger.

The lieutenant handed his speaking-trumpet to Mr. Goldsborough, and said:

"The captain orders the crew to quarters without noise, sir!"

"All right, sir—have the guns of your division cast loose, and see all clear for action!"

"Young gentlemen, pass the word quietly—all hands to stations and quarters!"

The two midshipmen of the watch darted off to obey the order, and within five minutes the officers and crew were all at their stations, and soon the noble ship was ready for action.

Meantime the strange schooner rose very rapidly, and with the naked eye those who were in a position to look over the bulwarks of the frigate, could see a wall of foam rolling to either side of her sharp bows.

"She comes with 'a rush' for a breeze like this!" said the captain, addressing his executive officer. "What do you think she can be?"

"She must be a man-of-war, sir—for she does not change her course, though she can see our ensign and pennant, and thus know what we are. Her colors wouldn't show with the wind aft and all her canvas set till she is up with us!"

"That is true—but she must heave to. You can get ready to board her and see that she is all right. Fire a lee gun when she is pretty close aboard!"

The captain, a noble-looking man of middle age, now went into his cabin. He returned in a few minutes with his sword belted on and a fine silver speaking-trumpet in his hand.

In the mean time the third cutter, the first lieutenant's boat, had been cleared away ready for lowering and its crew of twelve men and a coxswain, each wearing a belted cutlass and a pistol at his side, stood ready to enter it as soon as it touched the water.

The schooner was now dead to windward, scarce half a mile off.

"Back our main-yards, and let her have the lee gun!" said the captain.

The instant the order was given the yards swung around—the vessel lost her headway, and the heavy boom of a fore-castle gun to leeward rolled over the sea.

It was answered by the schooner in almost a second's time. Luffing up, her sheets were drawn in, and, as she came broadside-to, the new flag of the just-formed Republic of Mexico was seen fluttering at her main gaff.

Then it was seen that she carried two long, brass pivot-guns of heavy caliber—one on the fore-castle—the other and the heaviest, amidships. Her tall masts raked far backward, her booms and gaffs were very long, and her sharp hull lay so low in the water that its immense beam could only be seen when the foresail was brailed up out of the way.

"What schooner is that?" cried Captain Renshaw.

"The Diablocito—(little devil)—bearing a commission from General Guadalupe Victoria, President of the Republic of Mexico!" answered a tall and noble-looking young officer in uniform, who stood on the quarter-deck, trumpet in hand.

"What frigate is that?"

"The United States frigate Macedonian—Renshaw commanding, on a cruise. I will send a boat on board!"

"Thank you, sir!" said the officer, courteously, speaking in good English, though he wore a very Spanish look.

His crew—full one hundred men, if not more, was composed apparently of men of all nations—a stalwart but desperate-looking set.

As the beautiful schooner came up in the wind, with her head-sheets drawn to windward and her helm alee, she became almost stationary, lying a short cable's length to windward of the frigate. The frigate's boat was already in the water, and, a minute later, with the first lieutenant in full uniform, was on her way to the schooner.

There—a short ladder was dropped over the side, man-ropes were held by two seamen, and the lieutenant was received by the captain of the schooner as he touched the schooner's deck.

Captain Renshaw marked the politeness and ease exhibited by the Mexican officer in receiving his lieutenant, and noticed that together they went down into the cabin.

They were there for perhaps five or six minutes, and then the lieutenant came on deck, and, shaking hands with the Mexican captain, descended into his boat, and pushing off, was quickly rowed back to the frigate.

"I find her all right, sir—a duly commissioned Mexican privateer, sir—and her captain an American, born of a Spanish mother and Yankee father."

"Did you tell him we were bound over to Havana?" asked Renshaw.

"Yes, sir—and he said, laughing, that we could report the Diablocito on a cruise, if we liked, for he thought he had the heels of any craft that Spain could send after him!"

"I should think he had. She is as sharp fore and aft as a wedge. And such spars I never saw in a vessel of her tonnage!"

"She is deep, sir—very deep in the water. She does not look it, but she registers three hundred tons. She will play roughly with Spanish commerce, and it has got to be a well-managed man-of-war that can successfully handle her!"

"That is true. You can pipe down, sir, and put the frigate on her course!"

Then Captain Renshaw raised his trumpet.

"Schooner ahoy!" he shouted. "I wish you a pleasant cruise and safe return to port. You can fill away, sir."

"Thank you, sir. We wish you a jolly cruise and a healthy one!"

The next moment the head-sheets were drawn on the schooner, her main-sheet let go by the run, the helm put hard up and the schooner gathering instant way shot ahead and clear of the frigate and stood down the Gulf on her former course before steerage-way had been gathered on the frigate.

"That fellow knows how to handle his craft!" said the captain. "She is well named and will give Spain lots of trouble if not soon overhauled and taken in!"

"Did you notice her figure-head, captain?" asked the lieutenant.

"Not specially—it was a human figure, was it not?"

"An infernal figure, I should call it, sir. It represented Satan, even to horns, cloven feet, and forked tail!"

"Well, it suits her name, and those whom she overhauls will think it suits her calling. I am glad Mexico is able to arm and man such a craft. Spain has had her tyrannic sway but too long in Mexico and South America!"

By this time the frigate was on her course, and with the watch only on duty, the watch lieutenant took the deck.

CHAPTER II.

THE BUCCANEER UNMASKED.

A SMILE of triumph lighted the face of the pretended captain of the schooner, as the frigate swept off on her course, and he cried out:

"Capitano—the Gringo is off, and we are safe!"

Even as he spoke, a man who had been seated in the shadow of the head-sails, forward of the bow gun, rose and came aft.

He was tall, of herculean build, armed with sword and pistol in his belt, and so marked in feature and expression that once seen he would never be forgotten. His dark face was scarred by a sword-cut from the temple to the chin on the right side—and as he wore no beard, the livid scar was seen the more vividly. His eyes, intensely black, seemed literally to burn with ferocity. His aquiline nose, his high cheekbones, his thin lips, close-drawn, every expression was almost savage.

Over his long black hair he wore a broad-rimmed Spanish sombrero, turned up in front with a diamond buckle, in which a plume was based that extended over the crown of the hat and fell back on his shoulders, mingling with his long, coal-black hair.

This plume was a fiery red and made from ostrich-feathers; it glittered in the blaze of the closing sunlight as if touched with diamond-dust; and from its intense color, had conferred upon its wearer the title of Fire Feather.

"You have done well, camarado!" he said, in a harsh tone, with a foreign accent. "It is brave to run under an enemy's guns and go off free! Thou art cool and ready, Marvel, and we've fooled the Gringos* nicely!"

"Ay, my capitano—the lieutenant drank in my tale as deftly as he did some of our old Madeira down below. He seemed so much interested in Mexico and her freedom, that he never looked beyond the forged commission which I showed him!"

"Good! They will hardly report us at Havana. If they do, what need we care? For a week we'll hug this coast and pick up what the saints may send us! Shorten sail as soon as night falls and join me in the cabin, leaving Canovas in charge of the watch."

Mr. Marvel, who was in reality the first officer of the schooner, bowed, and the red-plumed captain descended into his cabin.

Being relieved by the second officer, Canovas, a full-blooded Spaniard, Mr. Marvel descended into the after cabin.

This was a spacious and elegantly-furnished apartment, with two large state-rooms on either side, having indeed more accommodation than was needed by the two officers who occupied it, for Canovas and Wilson, the other two lieutenants.

* Gringo, a term of derision for Yankee.

ants, occupied the wardroom forward of the cabin, the gunner, boatswain and sailmaster messing with them.

The captain was reclining lazily on the cushioned transom which extended across the after part of the cabin, when Mr. Marvel came down, but he rose when his first officer entered the cabin.

"I have shortened sail, Captain Spirifort!" said he. "The packet on which we put our passenger sought to be up with us by midnight, and if he does his duty there will be no danger of our missing her."

"No fear but that Barth will do his part!" said the captain. "We have tried him often, and he has never failed. He'll have the ship ablaze within a minute after he makes us out, and all other directions will be followed, you may depend. The cargo of the ship, cotton, is only fit for the flames, but the passengers—they will yield jewels and gold! There were many of them, you said?"

"Ay, capitano—and if I err not, rich ones—men and woman who have spent their winter in the sunny South, and would now go North to a colder clime!"

"Ha! They may find a hotter clime yet before we have done with them. Ho—steward! Jumbo, you black rascal!"

"Here is Jumbo—massa cap'n. What for black rascal?—him no do nuffin' he isn't told!" answered a tall, smart-looking black, neatly dressed in trousers and jacket of white duck.

"Then do something you are told. Get supper on the table in a hurry!"

"Yis, massa cap'n? Jumbo him hab gallina, pisco, caviar, jawbone, everything good!"

"Put them on—be quick, and no talk!"

"Ki! what Jumbo hab tongue for if no can use him!" muttered the servant, as he hurried to set out the table, loading it with silver plate, wines, and all manner of delicacies.

While Spirifort and his chief officer sup, we will open another chapter and go back a few hours.

CHAPTER III.

A FIEND'S WORK.

Two or three hours before the Diablocito had been sighted by the frigate lookout, the clipper schooner had overhauled a large ship bound from New Orleans to New York, loaded below and on deck with cotton. On her after deck were many passengers, and among them all there were pallid looks of apprehension, until the schooner was announced as a Mexican man-of-war. They had feared she was a pirate, and the captain of the ship, without arms, and barely crew enough to work his ship, had himself trembled for the fate before him—though he strove to hide his fears.

But when the captain of the schooner asked him if he would take a passenger North, whom they had found on a prize and did not care to keep, he gladly consented—he was so much pleased to think that which he had feared was a pirate, was only a Mexican vessel-of-war.

So a Mr. Barth, claiming to be an Englishman, was brought on board by a boat from the schooner, with a small valise for baggage, and as he seemed to be a gentleman, the captain made room for him in his already crowded cabin.

The moment that the new passenger was disengaged from the attention of the ship's captain, he was surrounded by passengers eager to hear his story, for none doubted he had one to tell, and he was the hero of the hour.

His tale was this: He had been spending the winter in Havana, and had sailed for Mobile in a Spanish trading-schooner, hoping thence to get a passage North, whither he wished to go.

Just off the coast of Alabama the schooner was fallen in with and captured by the Mexican privateer, and with her crew sent as a prize to Tampico. He boldly claiming his liberty as an Englishman, had been kept on board the privateer awaiting an opportunity to be transferred to an inward-bound vessel.

The story was not doubted on the packet—it seemed so probable, and the narrator looked like what he claimed to be—a traveled Englishman.

As the schooner sped swiftly off down the Gulf to continue her search of Spanish commerce, the packet captain dismissed all his fears and stood steadily on his course without any doubts or misgivings.

His new passenger moved about the vessel like one used to the sea, and did his duty like a good trencher at the supper-table.

The noble ship under all canvas stood up the Gulf Stream, coming just near enough to the Florida shore to sight Sand Key and Key West lights, both of which were passed long before midnight.

The ship had made nice headway all day, and when the moon rose near the mid hour of night, and the watch was changed, her deck had been long deserted by passengers, and all save the men on duty were supposed to be slumbering in their berths below.

But one man—I might better say a fiend in human shape, was wakeful. It was the new passenger. Crouched away under the shade of a lower sail he scanned the water far and near,

and when the moon rose a muttered exclamation told that he saw what he had been looking for.

Inshore, on the port bow of the packet he saw the white gleam of canvas. Drawing a small pocket spy-glass from inside his vest he scanned the sail closely, and soon knew it was the craft he wished to see.

Then commenced his work; the plan had been laid by his superiors before, and he had but to follow it.

Close by the fore-rigging, then by the main, he set fire alight in the cotton, and before any discovery could be made he was away below, and there another fire was made.

Thence he crept into the cabin, and when full half an hour after the dread shouts of "fire! FIRE!" rung fore and aft, he came up with the rest of the terror-stricken passengers—as innocent in appearance as any of them.

The sleepy watch had been so long in discovering the fire that it had reached the tarred-rigging and canvas before it was discovered, and when all hands rushed to the deck the flames, beyond control, were leaping high amid the shrouds and masts and yards.

Now the new passenger seemed heroic in his energy.

While the captain and crew madly and yet hopelessly sought to stay the flames, he shouted:

"Clear away the boats! Get the ladies and helpless passengers in first! I see a sail to leeward. We may all be saved. To work, if ye be men, and help the helpless!"

And he rushed around among the passengers and told them to get their money and valuables, for it would be hopeless to try to save heavy baggage.

Wrought to a sense of duty by the apparent coolness and heroism of this man, the captain now lent his energies to the work, and soon the two large quarter-boats were filled with passengers from the burning packet, each of whom, as a matter of course, saved what they could carry of their most precious property.

Meantime a vessel was seen under sail and nearing them, and the captain of the packet, willing to utilize Mr. Barth, cried out:

"Take charge of the two boats, sir, please, and put the passengers safely on that coming vessel. Then return for us, for if we cannot get the long-boat out we are helpless!"

With a smile of assent, Barth leaped into one of the boats, seized the tiller and cried out to both crews to shove off.

The great ship, now all on fire aloft, lighted up the waters far and near, and more than one of the passengers recognized the vessel now so near as the Mexican schooner seen before, earlier in the day.

That vessel hove to, waited for the boats, lowering none of her own, however, and when the two boats reached her side, Mr. Barth sung out:

"I bring you all the passengers from the New Orleans packet, sir!"

"All right! We'll take care of them. Jump aboard, sir!" came in sharp response from the lips of Mr. Marvel.

Captain Spirifort said nothing, but with his keen dark eyes watched each passenger as he or she was helped on board.

"Take the ladies into the captain's cabin—the night air is chilly!" said Mr. Marvel, addressing Jumbo, who stood bare-headed by the companionway.

"Yes, Massa Marbel! Dis way, ladies—dis way to de saloon!" said the negro, grinning.

"De odder hatch to de wardroom—gemmens!"

"Let the boats go back to the ship!" said Spirifort, in a low tone, to Marvel.

"Then fill away under all sail and head for the east coast of Cuba!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" was the response.

And the boats, with only the crews belonging to the packet, were told to hurry back. Then, while the rescued passengers were sent below in the schooner, her sails were all set and she stood away swiftly, leaving the burning ship to her fate—her captain wondering at the heartlessness which such a course in the Mexican evinced.

Had he known, which in his own mad struggle for life he could not, the real character of those who now held his helpless passengers in their power, he would have sooner welcomed the speedy death which seemed to await him and his crew, rather than share their awful fate on board of a merciless pirate.

For such indeed was the DIABLOCITO, well masked, as she thus far has shown herself.

But once, after sail was made and the schooner dashed away, did the pirate captain look toward the burning ship. She was all a mass of flame, and two boats so loaded with men that it seemed they could not float, were lying near her, apparently waiting the end of the ship that had been their home.

"It will never do for those boats to reach the shore and report us!" said Marvel, after a moment's thought.

"They never will! Look there! In half an hour we shall be scudding under shortened sail!" said the captain.

He pointed to a dense wall of clouds which was rising wondrous fast in the northern board.

"It is true—the overcrowded boats could never live and meet a gale!" said Mr. Marvel.

"What is next on the board? The disposition of the passengers, I suppose?"

"Ay! Their gold and jewels secured—the plank for the men! We will consider the fate for the women!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE WIND-BOUND FLEET.

A LITTLE after sunrise, under reefed sails, before a gale which had stricken her just before day, the gallant frigate Macedonian stood in past the Moro Castle and made her way up the beautiful harbor of Havana, to the usual man-of-war anchorage off the Arsenal.

There were several Spanish men-of-war at their moorings, one American man-of-war schooner, and a sharp, saucy-looking English brig-of-war.

The American schooner was at once recognized as the Fire Fly, belonging to the West India squadron with the Macedonian, and hardly had the sails of the latter been furled before a boat from the schooner, with her young captain, Dahlgreen, in it, was alongside.

He was warmly welcomed by Mr. Goldsborough, who escorted him to the cabin to meet Captain Renshaw, who had just donned his full uniform preparatory to a visit to the shore after the customary salute had been fired.

"I am glad you came before I sailed, sir," said Dahlgreen to Captain Renshaw. "If this norther had not sprung up I should have gone to sea at sunrise, and so would the Lark, that clipper English brig over there."

"Anything special to send you out of this pleasant harbor?" asked the captain of the frigate.

"Yes, sir—a piratical schooner has been doing fiendish work on the south side of the island. She has captured and burned or sunk nearly a dozen vessels—some American and some English, French and Spanish. A poor woman whose life had been spared, after undergoing every horror, was left at one of their rendezvous on the south side of the island, and creeping away, got into a canoe and was picked up by the English brig."

"She has given a full description of the schooner and her officers, and we intend jointly to go in search for her as soon as the wind will permit."

"Good! What kind of a vessel is the pirate?"

"A very large, sharp-built schooner, with two long, heavy brass pivot-guns, carrying near one hundred men, commanded by a Spaniard, but with an English or American first mate and a desperate crew of all nations and colors!"

Captain Renshaw looked at Mr. Goldsborough, who was listening to the words of Commander Dahlgreen.

"Did the vessel have any name, or any peculiarity by which you will know her apart from this general description?" asked the former.

"Yes, sir—she was called the Diablocito—and she has a Satan for a figure-head!"

"Thunder and MARS! Not sixteen hours ago we had this very vessel close under our guns and Goldsborough here was on board of her!"

"Yes—and took a glass of wine with the man who claimed to be her commander, after he had showed me his Mexican commission!" said Goldsborough, almost white with vexation. "It must be the same craft, for she was armed with two brass pivot-guns, besides some carronades, had a heavy mixed crew, and she sailed like a witch. But I saw no Spanish captain. The man who appeared to be her captain said he was American born, of a Spanish mother. But her name and her figure-head settle the question. They are the same you describe!"

"Then she has shifted her cruising-ground. Most likely she found cruisers after her on the southern side of the island, and wishes to avoid them!" said Dahlgreen.

"We will both go to sea when the gale slackens!" said Captain Renshaw. "If I ever get her under my guns again, she will not be likely to get away!"

A visit from the Captain of the Port now interrupted the conversation, and Dahlgreen went down into the wardroom to greet some of his old messmates, for he had been promoted out of the Macedonian to his present command.

The Captain of the Port had but just left the frigate, when the commander of H. B. M. gun-brig Lark was piped over the side.

After paying his respects to Captain Renshaw, the captain of the brig was greatly surprised with the information that the piratical schooner he intended to seek had been seen not more than six or seven hours' sail from Havana, and when he heard the course she steered he announced his intention of putting out after her, no matter how hard it blew.

"I hardly think you'll be able to carry sail in a gale that made us reef down with a free wind!" said Captain Renshaw. "We will go to sea as soon as it slackens—I do not care to strain my spars before. We'll need them all to catch this villain, for he sails like a cloud before a storm!"

"We'd be more apt to catch him napping in a gale!" said the Englishman. "But I'll hold on till you go out, and then we can cruise in a way to meet once in awhile and compare notes. The wretch cannot evade all of us, if he yet haunts these Southern seas!"

"Not unless his master, whose figure-head he carries, helps him!" said Renshaw.

CHAPTER V.

THE PIRATE'S LAIR.

IN all the Southern or Caribbean sea, studded as it is with islands, there are none so full of little harbors, sheltering bays, creeks and lagunes as is that of Cuba. The writer knows whereof he speaks, for was he not in the Musquito fleet, and did he not spend many a hot, weary day and night searching out piratical haunts?

It was the evening of the fourth day from that on which our story opened.

Sheltered by a lofty island of bare rock, that broke the force of the ocean waves which roared and thrashed against its outer base, a vessel lay in the mouth of a small, but deep lagune that opened like an artificial canal into the high, rocky coast near the east end of the island of Cuba.

This lagune, fed by a creek which came rushing down from among the mountains, could not be seen by any one approaching from seaward, so nearly was the rocky island like the main coast, from which indeed it was only separated by a channel barely wide enough for a vessel to enter, and this channel could be used at either end, so that all winds were fair at one point or the other for entrance or departure.

A single glance at the tall, raking masts—the long booms and gaffs of this schooner, even if we did not see her demoniac figure-head, her bright pivot-guns, and the dare-devil-looking men lounging about her decks, would tell us that she was the Diablocito.

A part of her crew were on shore cutting wood for the cook's use, others were up the lagune towing down a raft of newly-filled water-casks.

The shore view, for that island and region was wonderfully drear and desolate, no sign of human habitation could be seen among the arid rocks heaped back from the shore. Only far inland did the rank vegetation look tropical.

The second officer, Canovas, was on deck, the third occupied a station or lookout on the rocky island, from which only could a view of the sea beyond be had.

Down in the cabin, where we last saw them, were the pirate chief and his executive—the first looking ill, bearing marks of dissipation in his sunken eyes and pallid face.

Empty bottles, overturned goblets, and the wreck of a feast on the table told as much as his own haggard looks.

What had become of the passengers, male and female, who had been taken from the burning packet? They had been received on board that vessel—but now, not one could be seen. Let the imagination paint their fate. The pirate's motto is that "the dead tell no tales."

And better is it that the veil be drawn, that our eyes may not see how they suffered and how they died; it is sad enough that we know no mortal eye could ever see them more.

"Fill your glass, Marvel—fill up, I say!" cried Fire Feather, fiercely. "I want no puling, sickish sensibility shown here. I've made you my first officer—you have obeyed my orders well, and I want you to share my pleasures as well as the harsher duties of your station."

"Capitano," said Marvel, trying to appear cheerful, "you know I am no hand at the wine cask. I try to do my duty as I promised I would when you spared my life. Let that suffice. You and the rest can do the drinking—let me watch for your safety while the others are blind to all danger."

"You are right and I am wrong!" said the captain, as he drank off a bumper of cogniac.

"The gale is about over—I suppose we'll take to blue water again," said Marvel.

"Ay! this is a dull hole to lay by in—yet safe—out of the way of passing and curious vessels. Even the coasters avoid the dangerous reefs that lay off-shore. That brandy seems to put new life into your veins. The medicine is good."

"A signal has been shown by the lookout, sir," said Canovas, coming to the cabin door. "It reads, 'a sail in sight!'"

"Ah? Then we have something to think of!" cried the captain. "Marvel, see that no smoke is made on board or ashore. Caution the men to silence while they work. I will take my telescope and go look for myself upon the sail that is reported. Let Canovas see that everything is gotten ready to make sail, should this craft look like one worth overhauling!"

These orders given, the captain, donning his red-plumed sombrero, went on deck, stepped over the side into a small boat that was fastened alongside, and sculled over to the neighboring island.

Leaving the boat on a rocky slope on which he drew it up, he took his glass and ascended the inner steep of the lofty rock by a path partly hewn in the solid precipice. It was a lofty perch where the lookout sat, but screened from the sight of any one at sea by a thicket of the wild sea grape.

The signals made were shown below the inner crest of the peak, and of course were only visible to those in or about the lagune.

After he reached the station and set his glass, the pirate captain glanced at the sail the lookout had reported.

"A ship—ay, and a large one!" he muttered. "A man-of-war!" Then turning angrily to the lieutenant by his side, he cried out:

"Where are your eyes? See you not two other sails in sight? Look close in under the land—there creeps a foretopsail schooner along as near as she can sail to the reefs. She too is a man-of-war. And further out, between her and the ship, is a brig—I'll warrant she too is armed! How came it you did not report sooner?"

"There was a mist or fog out seaward which hid them until the moment I reported the first I saw. Even now you can see a trace of it, as the breeze sweeps it out to seaward. It has been almost calm till within the hour," said the officer.

"Well—what is must be! Hasten down and tell Marvel in the utmost silence to have every man on board and at his station; to see the guns double-shotted, the swivels set, and the sails loosed, ready to use should our refuge be discovered.

"These vessels will be on us, or past us, before darkness can hide their movements. I will stay here to the last moment to watch them. If they sail by, with unchanging course, all for us is well. If not, they'll find the *Diablocito* hard to take. Go, Basil, and be in haste. But tell Marvel not to let the men take alarm. It will be enough for them to know what the danger is when it reaches them."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

And the officer hurried down from his post, while the captain again turned his glass upon the strangers.

Marvel received the message sent by the captain and instantly hurried to obey every order. Directing Canovas to watch for signals from the captain, he in person saw to getting the vessel ready for action or flight, while Mr. Barth, who had been in charge of the watering-party, got his casks in over the side as noiselessly as possible.

For a time the captain made no sign, and as night was now close at hand, Marvel hoped the danger was passing on.

But, suddenly, the boom of a heavy gun came thundering in upon their ears from seaward, and the captain was seen to leave his post and to rush in mad haste down the hillside toward the boat which Marvel sent to meet him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIEND'S DARING.

"A MILLION curses! The gleam of sunlight must have flashed on the diamond buckle of my plume and some sharp-eyed lookout got sight of me!" cried Captain Spirifort, as he sprang on his vessel's deck. "A boat lowered from the man-of-war schooner is coming shoreward, while a signal she made has drawn both frigate and gunboat nearer to the shore. Wilson, take one boat with ten men and lay close to the channel at the south end of Cover Island—Canovas do the same at the north end. When that boat comes in, if she finds the channel, secure her and her crew without giving them a chance to make alarm, if it is possible. She has six men and an officer. In the mean time we will make ready here to cut and run when darkness comes, or to fight, if more boats follow the first. Barth—to the lookout—keep well hidden—but signal every motion of our enemies."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

And the Englishman sprang into the tiny skiff and was off to the island in a second of time.

In a few minutes two armed boats with muffled oars pulled for the entrance of each channel as directed by the pirate leader.

"We'll have help from our friend and Master soon," said Marvel.

"What do you mean?" asked Spirifort.

"Look at that black cloud hanging over the mountains. Five minutes since I saw but a tiny speck there. It is a hurricane rising, and swiftly, too. No vessel will hug this coast an hour hence, and if we are let alone till darkness falls, we'll not be troubled this night, nor again by those armed wolves who are evidently after us!"

"Good—let it come! As you say—Satan seems ever ready to help his namesake! But that boat, if it happens to hit the channel, will be in here before darkness falls or the storm can reach us—Ah!—Barth signals!"

"Yes—the boat is inside the reef and heads for the northern channel. No other boat follows. She is sent to explore. What her crew discovers—will never be made known to those who sent them. Quick, with another boat, my good Marvel; join Wilson and let the strange boat be boarded the instant she rounds the end of the island. She will then be out of sight from seaward. Without noise, let every man perish—and then come back. We will slip out to sea in the darkness, even if we have to run under bare poles!"

Marvel, without reply, hastened to obey orders. In a short time with a larger boat and a dozen men to reinforce Wilson, he was on his way.

And now, the red-plumed captain caused every sail on his schooner to be loosed and close-reefed, and then by a single cable fast to an anchor the pirate vessel lay, ready to spread her wings in flight, or if need be to belch out death and destruction from her double-shotted guns.

Striding to and fro, with his scarred face all aglow with fierce excitement, the pirate leader

watched for the boat to round the point where his own men lay like hungered tigers in ambush.

Not long had the sea fiend to wait for the result.

Suddenly, while the last rays of the setting sun were gilding the mountain-tops in the west, the strange boat shot around the point of the island—not even an oar's length from those who waited to grapple with her. And quick as thought itself, boarded from both sides, the American crew were seized and overpowered.

One single pistol-shot, fired by the officer in command of the boat, sending one pirate to his doom, was the only sound heard. The next instant, officer and men—not one left—lay bleeding and dying in the boat, stabbed to their hearts by pirate knives.

Then, leaving the boat and its ghastly cargo adrift, Marvel and his comrades came dashing back to the schooner.

"Let their boat go adrift, the hurricane is close aboard. Up with our own boats and ready for sea!" shouted Spirifort. Then he signaled for Barth to come in from the lookout.

The latter was on board by the time the boats hung at their davits.

"The schooner is very close to the northern reef, sir!" he reported to Spirifort. "They were watching their boat as she rounded the point of the island. The gun-brig and frigate are hove to a couple of miles to seaward! No other boats have been lowered!"

"Good! We will slip to sea on the wings of this hurricane by the southern channel, when it and darkness come upon us!"

Not long had they to wait. While the American boat with its ghastly cargo was slowly drifting out of the harbor by the channel in which it came, the blackness of the fast-coming storm overshadowed it as a pall. Already a hoarse sound like the groan of a monster in agony was heard inland. It was the howl of the tempest, and with only a close-reefed foresail set the schooner lay ready to cast off and yield herself to the wild gale when it came.

Even before night was on them—darkness—the darkness of the storm shadowed everything.

Marvel himself took the helm—his eye on the compass, with the binnacle lamp alight. Quickly—with a force which bent the naked spars of the schooner, down swept the fierce black clouds full of wind, and when the vessel was loosed from her anchorage, even the shore, close as it was, could not be seen until, while the vessel shot away, a sulphurous lightning-flash revealed it, and its gray cliffs seemed to shake under the heavy thunder-peat that followed.

And away—away like a scared bird flew the phantom craft, guided by the hand of Marvel, whose eye never left the compass by which alone he could keep the channel of escape.

Soon, with the rushing wind driving the schooner madly on, the latter felt the heave of the sea, and even while she almost buried bows under beneath her scant sail, a flash of fire to the northward and a dull, but heavy boom, spoke of her discovery by the vigilant enemies on watch.

But away—away before the fearful gale, amid lightning-flash and thunder-peat, she dashed, and her red-plumed chief laughed in sardonic glee as he cried:

"There floats no craft can catch the *Diablocito* now; her wings are spread and her ocean home is opening wide before her!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE BAFFLED SEA-HOUNDS.

WHEN the Fire Fly, drawing the least water, was creeping along the Cuban coast far inside of the deep-draughted brig and frigate, her young captain, spy-glass in hand, was constantly scanning the land in person, though he had look-outs aloft who were ordered to report any sail, or sign of life seen inshore or out, by them.

And it was Captain Dahlgreen himself who saw first a dazzling flash and then a head surmounted by a red-plumed hat amid the bushes which crested a lofty part of the shore to the westward of his vessel, a little before sunset. Though it disappeared the instant it caught his glance, the young captain felt sure that his vessel was being watched by the head he had seen. To signal the vessels outside he fired a gun, and then he ordered a boat lowered and sent a young officer in her with an armed crew to try and discover if there was any harbor, river, or hiding-place inshore where a vessel might have found refuge.

Scarcely had the boat left the vessel's side when he saw the rising clouds over the land betokening a storm, but he hoped the boat would be back before the storm could break, and anchoring with a light breeze just outside the reefs he waited and watched her movements.

The boat was rowed in rapidly and by sunset was close to the shore in which, from the schooner, no break could be seen. But when Captain Dahlgreen suddenly saw the boat shoot in out of sight, he knew a river or lagune had been discovered, and he watched with feverish impatience for the boat's return and report.

Meantime he saw with alarm how swiftly the storm-cloud rose in the west, knowing from experience what those hurricanes were, and that

even close as he was to the land, he never could hold anchorage there when the force of the storm should break upon him.

Just as darkness was closing and the storm was breaking, he got a glimpse of a boat leaving the land—driven, it seemed, rather by the force of the wind than by oars, and though he was ready with close-reefed storm-sails for the hurricane, he determined to hold on by his hawser till the boat returned, if he could so hold, before making sail.

Quickly darkness and the storm shut the land from sight—but he burned blue-lights for his boat and waited till the hurricane struck him in its force. With no sail, his hawser at full scope, the kedge held him a little while, the water yet smooth, but now, when the wind rose higher, the lightning flashed, and the thunder pealed, he began to fear the boat had put back, and when his anchor began to drag he was forced to order sail set for steerage-way.

At that instant a lookout forward shouted:

"A boat! close aboard!"

Instantly ordering blue lights burned, which lighted up the sea all around them, young Dahlgreen, his officers and crew saw the boat, and a horrible sight in it.

The crew dead, their white duck clothes drenched in blood, were plainly seen as the boat drifted by helplessly before the gale.

Instantly firing his signal-gun, the young commander sought by steering to leeward of the boat to recover his dead—but the furious hurricane now drove boat and vessel alike off the coast, and they were parted in a few short moments to meet no more.

Now a new cause of excitement arose. The lookout forward declared that in a flash of lightning far down the coast he had distinctly seen the spars of a vessel under one scant sail stealing down the shore. The man was an old seaman, sharp-eyed and trusty, and the young commander, coupling the bloody sight he had seen in his boat with the vessel reported, felt sure it was the pirate flying in the storm from this close pursuit.

Firing three guns rapidly, a signal agreed upon with the other vessels in case of a discovery at night, Dahlgreen now crowded all the sail he dared and bore away south in hopes he might even, dark as it was, keep where he could find the pirate when light once more came.

He had bright signal lights hung over the stern of his vessel, so that the brig and frigate might see he was in chase and follow his example.

Once, and once only, when a long zigzag streak of lightning ran along the southern board, did he get a glance in that direction. And then he too saw the tall spar and the single sail which his lookout had reported. She was close in under the land, scudding southeast in smooth water, the wind apparently on her beam and going very fast.

"Get the reefed mainsail on the schooner!" shouted the young commander. "I'll drive her under before the murderous pirate shall escape me!"

Trembling under her canvas the good schooner plunged on—but all was darkness in her course. Running by compass—every eye and ear alert, for no one knew what moment the roar of breakers might be heard, the Fire Fly fairly flew through the water, and thus she ran for hours and hours—no one asleep, all hands on deck and at quarters, praying for light to come, and that it might show the enemy within gunshot.

But when light came—they saw only the bold wooded bluffs at the east point of Cuba on their weather bow, no sail in sight, except two very far astern, whose square sails and lofty rig were too well known to be mistaken—the brig and the frigate.

The wind had lessened to a fair eight-knot breeze, and Dahlgreen after reaching the point of the island, hove to, to await his consorts, for if the pirate was ahead of him she had gone from sight.

In that terrible gale she had either driven fast and far, found some new harbor or hiding-place, or had been dashed upon some jutting reef or hidden rock and gone from human sight forever.

Or at least thus thought the heroic commander of the American schooner.

With the fresh breeze the frigate and brig closed rapidly and learned for the first time that the schooner had been in luck so far as to have sighted a vessel supposed to be the pirate—also heard of the murder of her boat's crew.

On consultation it was decided to have the brig and schooner return to the part of the coast they had left the night before to more closely examine the supposed inlet or harbor, and to wait a given time there, if they could enter it, in hope the pirate would return. Meantime the frigate was to run around to the south side of the island, cruise as far as the Isle of Pines, and if no pirate was to be seen or heard of, return and rejoin the schooner and brig where they were to await her.

This plan originating with Lieutenant McIntosh, who having been active in Porter's Mosquito fleet in search of pirates, seemed to lay the most feasible plan of several thought of, and it was therefore adopted.

CHAPTER VII.

A DARING RUSE.

God is gracious! And grateful to Him was the captain of the burning cotton-ship in the hour of terrible peril, when he and his crew in two boats, loaded to the gunwale, and on the point of sinking in the rough sea caused by the rising gale, were rescued by a wrecking-schooner, the *Whale*, which had run off on sight of the burning ship, to help if help would be available.

The *Whale*, belonging in Key West, stood into that port under close-reefed sail, and the survivors from the burned ship were treated with the kindness and hospitality seamen in their condition ever meet in an American port. With nothing saved but their lives and the clothes they stood in, they were in need of all the kindness shown.

And now the captain, his officers and men had time to confer about the origin of the fire. Breaking out as it did in three different places with violence, it was evident that an incendiary hand had caused it. As the ship was not insured, for insurance could hardly be had on vessels sailing in those waters then, and the captain was half-owner of the ship, there was no incentive to her destruction by any one on board.

The desertion of the ship in her distress by the Mexican man-of-war which had taken off her passengers was commented on very severely—but not till three days later when news came from Havana describing that vessel as a pirate, and announcing that several men-of-war were after her, did matters assume a shape which the captain of the lost ship could understand.

Then he remembered how officious the man Barth had been in inducing the passengers to take all their money and jewelry in the boats with them when they were transferred to the schooner. And he argued, correctly, too, that Barth was one of the pirates, had been put on board as a passenger purposely to fire the ship, and then that the schooner laying in waiting had taken the passengers to plunder, and most likely destroy, while he and his crew were left to perish with the ship, or in an overloaded boat in the gale which was rising while the ship burned. The cargo of cotton was too bulky to be of value to the pirates, and thus was left to destruction.

The fate of the passengers was sadly discussed—it was scarcely to be expected that their lives were saved, and nameless horrors were thought of for the most helpless of them all.

News was sent by packet to Charleston, to be transferred back to New Orleans and on to New York where most of the passengers belonged, and a description of the pirate sent to every port within reach of correspondence, to put merchantmen on their guard and to expedite armed searches after the miscreant who thus roamed the seas defiant of all laws, human and divine.

With the mysterious power which guides Fancy's wings the writer will now carry the reader back to the point where the pirate hidden by night sped away before the black-winged storm on the Cuban coast.

Plainly, by the aid of the blue lights, could Captain Spirifort and his crew see the armed schooner that had so nearly reached their late hiding-place, and they knew when they saw the drifting boat so close alongside that schooner that their murderous work with its crew was most likely discovered.

Little cared they for this. Inshore, in water almost smooth, with all the sail they dared to carry, they went flying on at a speed which fully doubled any their pursuers could make. Knowing this, and that long before day dawned they would leave them out of sight, one watch of the crew was sent below to rest, and of the officers only Spirifort and his lieutenant Marvel remained on deck—the watch officers being sent below with the watch to sleep.

"Capitano mio! What will our course be when we have left the war-ships behind us off our scent?" asked Marvel, of Spirifort, who stalked moodily to and fro on the after deck by his side.

"That is what I am thinking of!" answered the Spaniard. "The waters of the Caribbean Sea will soon be too warm for our comfort. I think the frigate now in chase of us is the same we fooled so nicely off Key West. If so, she got news of our real character in Havana. I have feared it ever since that woman escaped from the Isle of Pines in a boat!" He added:

"She should not have lived to escape. For once I was too merciful!"

"It is not often the case!" said Marvel, with a ghastly smile. "If we could change our rig and figure-head, we might run safely into port in Baltimore, where I was born and raised, have a pleasant time, spend some of our money and let these men-of-war down here chase shadows for awhile."

"Good! The thought strikes me well. We can detach the figure-head and stow it below—run up square yards forward from our stock of spars, cross a main and topsail-yard and make our craft a brigantine. 'Tis but the work of a few busy hours to do that!"

"Yes—but our guns and heavy crew—how account for them?"

"Hoist Spanish colors. We can as easily play Spanish man-of-war for a little while, as Mexican. Our errand in from a cruise will be to rest our crew, get fresh provisions and water ship. Also to give our officers a little pastime on a friendly shore!"

"Splendid! It is so long since I have been in Baltimore, I would dearly love to walk her streets again. There are those whom I remember—but who will scarce remember me, since I was but a boy when in a clipper bound for the Southern trade, I left."

"Well—we will change our course as the gale lulls, and when day dawns it will find us many a league north of the Cuban coast! We will not call the other watch till the new course is laid!"

And thus it was that the schooner *Fire Fly* lost all trace of the pirate when day dawned for her on the Cuban coast.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SHORE CRUISE.

THE harbor of Baltimore is not quite so capacious as that of many of our Northern seaboard cities, but quite a fleet may lie moored in its pretty basin and in the stretch of deeper water fronting on old Fort McHenry. But it is seldom that the harbor contains any of our men-of-war, or those of foreign nations.

Norfolk, with its magnificent roadstead at Hampton, or Annapolis below, are nearer the ocean, easily got in and out of, and therefore more attractive. A single small sloop-of-war was lying below the city, bearing the American flag, when a stately brigantine-of-war, flying the Spanish flag, came booming up the bay with a free wind, and anchoring between the American sloop-of-war and the city, fired a national salute from her two pivot-guns, while the United States colors fluttered at her fore-truck.

The vessel saluted while her crew were furling sail in splendid style, drawing looks and remarks of admiration from the officers of the sloop-of-war and many a one on shore.

The harbor, too, was full of merchantmen, and many a skilled sailor looked with wonder on the prettily-handled craft as she rounded to and dropped her anchor.

Captain Spirifort had doffed his red-plumed hat for the time, and with the rest of his officers appeared in neat naval uniform.

Soon after anchoring he sent his first lieutenant to pay his official respects to the American commander, and went on shore himself to call on the mayor of the city and report the arrival of the Spanish brig-of-war *Guerrero*.

All of this was done in such regular manner that no one on shore or afloat for an instant deemed the stranger other than what she was reported. She had taken a pilot at sea, in the usual manner—paid him off when the anchor dropped, and he was engaged to take her to sea when her stay was ended.

Lieutenant *Marbello*, as Marvel now styled himself, made a profound sensation on board of the sloop-of-war by speaking such good English, though his accent was so foreign, and he was treated with that courtesy which our naval officers are ever noted for.

He announced that his captain had gone on shore to confer with the authorities in regard to procuring supplies, and would in due time do himself the honor to meet the American commander.

The stay of Lieutenant *Marbello* was not long, though decidedly pleasant, and scarcely had his boat cleared the range of her guns when the sloop-of-war with the Spanish flag at her fore returned the salute of the brigantine.

These salutes fairly roused the town, and soon from one end of the great city to the other the news spread that a Spanish man-of-war had anchored in the harbor.

And when it was known that her commander, a scarred and war-worn veteran, wearing the insignia of noble orders on his breast, had already called on the mayor officially, and intended to stay and revictual his vessel and refresh his crew and officers there, many a fair face brightened in anticipation of balls and fêtes to be given, as is usual on such occasions.

The arrival occurred so early in the day that the evening papers were full of it, though interviewing had not then been reduced to an art and the new-comers were not led to the torture.

Spirifort made his stay on shore as short as the rules of courtesy would permit, for he was in haste to return to compare notes with his first officer. He brought with him a late file of city papers, and when in the cabin alone with Marvel, pointed with his grim smile to a paragraph headed:

"PIRACY IN THE GULF OF MEXICO."

It contained an exaggerated account of terrible work done by the crew of a piratical schooner called the *Diablocito*, whose crew of murderous desperadoes were led by a gigantic mulatto who always wore a red plume in his hat, and was known among his class as the King of the Buccaneers.

Marvel read it over line by line, and laughed long and loud when he threw it down.

"We are bad enough, but they paint us worse than we are!" he said. "This calling you a mulatto is an insult which must be avenged."

We'll get on an even keel with the newspaper men before we leave them. Have you found out if there is any Spanish consul here?

"Oh, yes! He is an American acting as such and does not even speak Spanish. You must call on him, Marvel—invite him on board and we will fool him as nicely as we have the others!"

"Thanks!" said Marvel. "I'd like to take a stroll on shore to see if there is anything left I can remember."

His lips trembled and his face blanched when he spoke, but he did not tell Spirifort that he had left a mother and a baby sister there when he went to sea, whom he had tried in vain in all his wild years of adventure and lawless crime to forget. He had indeed more than one secret yet withheld from his lawless leader, and this was the choicest of them all.

If they lived, he would see them, perhaps meet them unknown. If they were dead, he would find their graves, and there let one holy thought for a brief moment find place in his heart.

So—still attired in his neat uniform of blue and gold, he entered his boat, was rowed ashore, and inquiring his way found the office of the Spanish consul in a dingy provision store near the wharf where he landed.

On informing the consul of the arrival of the *Guerrero* and her business in port, the consul received him with great gusto and offered at the lowest rates to see to revictualing the brigantine and supplying all stores needed.

Marvel could make no agreement until he had consulted the captain, but he had no doubt his country's consul would be the first called on for supplies. The consul promised to visit the brig next day, and he hoped to have the honor of the lieutenant's company at his own house, where he could receive him in a manner befitting his rank.

Marvel with gracious thanks promised to avail himself of the invitation and to bring his captain when he came again, and then as soon as possible turned away, for his heart throbbed wildly when he thought of his once happy home and those he had left there so many years before.

Though all these years had passed, he remembered well the stately brick mansion he had left on Calvert street where his widowed mother had lived, and now, hardened as he was to almost all human feelings, he trembled as he turned his steps toward the spot.

Street after street he passed, all much changed, yet with some old landmarks left, until he turned a corner and came to the block where he had passed his hours of youthful joy and innocence! New houses had gone up where old ones had been torn down—he shook with excitement as he hurried on—soon he stopped, as if rooted to the ground.

The old house—its roof mossy with age, the gray granite steps worn smooth as marble by time and use, was there. Trembling he went on, passing slowly to see what name was on the door-plate. His eye grew dim with mist, for he read a name—not that which he wore now, but a name that had known no dishonor while his father lived.

"She must be living yet," he murmured in a low tone, looking at an open window in the front parlor. He started back—as if a bullet had struck his heart. A lady, young, but wondrously beautiful, stood near the casement, toying with a white rose which she held in her hand.

She saw the wild, eager gaze of a stranger fixed upon her and drew back instantly beyond his sight.

"Who can she be? It cannot be my sister—those eyes seemed dark as night, while if memory serves, the baby eyes I loved so well were blue! I must and will find out. But how, keeping myself unknown? is the question. I have days before me—I will be cautious."

And he strode back to the wharf where his boat lay waiting and returned to the brigantine.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAYOR'S SOIREE TRANSFORMATION.

THE first day closed in the harbor for the pirate and when the Spanish colors were hauled down at sunset, Captain Spirifort had every man of his crew mustered aft.

"Men!" said he. "Listen in silence and give heed to all I say. Your pleasure and your safety will alone be insured by obedience to what I direct. You know me well and know no man can disobey me and live! You are here as Spanish men-of-war's-men. I shall allow you all a day and night on shore, a quarter-watch at a time, with plenty of money for enjoyment, but none for mad and reckless folly. You know that a drunken man has no sense! Therefore let no man of all this crew get drunk. If he does and I know it—he knows his doom! Keep still tongues in your heads—speak only Spanish and keep well together. If you hear four guns in as many minutes—come at once on board; it will be our signal for danger or ready for sailing!"

The crew listened in silence and when the stern speaker ceased, all bowed their heads in

token of obedience. They had found him a stern, but kind master, when obedient, but the least bit of mutiny, a rash word or look would bring death to the offender from his merciless hand ere scarce a word of warning left his lips.

Turning to his officers he said: "Two officers will go ashore with each quarter-watch and see to the conduct and safety of the men. Each man before he goes on shore will draw four doubloons from the common treasury. Now pipe down!"

The shrill pipe of the boatswain's mates sounded the signal and in a moment the deck was cleared and soon all hands were at supper below.

Spirifort and his first officer now descended to their cabin where Jumbo had the elegant table set and fresh delicacies from shore upon it.

"Dere, capitano, is de best set-out dis African gentleman ever put before de lip of man!" said Jumbo, as the officers entered the cabin.

"Dere's de canvas-back duck cold—de soft-shell crab hot—de wild turkey boned and de fame turkey fricassee! Dere's quail on toast and dere's oysters in every style. Jumbo has done all he knowed—he can do no more!"

"It is enough! You shall have a day's liberty ashore for this!" said the captain, smiling in his usual way.

"I doesn't want it, capitano. Colored folks is awful common dere ashore. I doesn't associate wid de like of dem! No, sah! Jumbo is your steward. Dat's glory enough for me. One ob dese days when I is rich enough I'll go back to Africa and be a king in Ashantee! I've dreamed of dat all my life and it's gwine to come true!"

"How many wives do the Ashantee kings have?" asked Marvel, quietly.

"I doesn't 'zactly remember—I wasn't more'n sixteen years old when de slavers stoled me away—but I reckon about a thousan'! That many would do for me anyway, Massa Marvel!"

"One is too many for some men!" said the officer, with a laugh.

And then he and the captain sat down to enjoy the tempting supper Jumbo had laid out.

The next day the brigantine was thronged with visitors most of the day. The Spanish consul and mayor came off and were received with all the honors. The officers of the American corvette came on board and were received with every courtesy. Spirifort and *Marbello* exerted themselves to please, and succeeded. Jumbo made a marvelous success with his refreshment table in the cabin.

The mayor and consul brought a joint invitation to a public ball got up at the house of the former in honor of their visitors—it was to occur that night, so that the Spanish officers could most speedily get acquainted with the elite of Baltimore society.

Spirifort accepted in the name of all his officers who could be spared from duty, much to the joy of the officials named. They said their preparations were necessarily brief, but they would do their best to make the night a happy one.

The officers of the American corvette were to be present, and the fairest belles of Baltimore and her bravest cavaliers were to be there to do honor to the guests of the city.

When the visits were over and Spirifort and his lieutenant sat down to a late dinner, they were almost wearied out with this new and strange business.

"A day's fighting would not tire me so much!" said the captain. "But we'll make these worthies pay us for our trouble, yet. I'll make my cost out of the town before I leave it!"

Marvel wondered how he meant to do it, but he did not ask.

When night came on, Spirifort, his breast ablaze with stars and jewelry, accompanied by Marvel, dressed almost as richly, with Canovas only in company, went on shore at the designated hour and were met at the wharf by the mayor's carriage.

They were soon driven to his elegant residence, near Monument Square, which was all ablaze with light, and filled almost too densely with the guests of the evening.

The scene was dazzling, and as Spirifort looked on fairy forms, lovely faces and jeweled ears and arms, he muttered to Marvel, in tones too low for other ears:

"What a prize if all these were ours! By all the saints 'tis an inspiring sight!"

Marvel smiled and in Spanish bade his chief be cool—a word or look once misconstrued might give them trouble. The young bloods of Baltimore though courteous to guests, are quick to resent even the shadow of a wrong.

Soon, while the bands struck up a grand march, the mayor, with the consul at his side, received his guests and presented them, as fast as they could approach, to his visitors.

Spirifort, speaking only in Spanish aided by Marvel and Canovas, contented himself with bowing low at each fresh introduction, though once in a while he commented aside to Marvel on the beauty of some fair lady as she passed on.

Thus matters were passing, when an elderly lady, dressed in elegant, but plain style, approached, having on her arm a lady, young and

of more exquisite beauty than any of the lovely ones yet presented.

A shiver came upon the form of Marvel, for at a glance he recognized that face!

The next second, the elderly lady advancing, met his gaze, gave one wild, startled look at his face and form and with a wild cry of wonder breaking from her lips, fell fainting to the floor!

CHAPTER X.

THE PIRATE'S FAIRY.

IN an instant all was confusion in the vicinity of the mayor and his guests. The lady who had fainted was one of the most honored dames in the city, a widow of wealth, and of the highest standing. The young lady who had rested on her arm was her daughter—the acknowledged supreme beauty of Baltimore—the *Belle*.

Marvel, or Lieutenant *Marbello*, as then known there, knew in an instant who that lady was, for he heard her name murmured on every side. And he had to choke down the feelings which almost unnerved him and to conceal the emotions he dared not exhibit. He knew that the lady was his mother. Also—that the lovely girl he had seen once before that day was his sister. With his reddened hands and crime-darkened soul he dared not make himself known to them, and, though he yearned to do it, and to be clasped in loving arms, he pleaded sudden illness on his part and left the company.

The lady who had fainted, borne to a chamber, soon revived and insisted, against the wishes of Sadie, her daughter, on returning to the reception-room.

Once there her eyes roved over every face in hopes to see again that dear resemblance—for, as she whispered to Sadie, she had seen a face so like that of her dead husband, (Sadie's father,) that it seemed to her as if he had risen from the grave to meet her.

She was now presented to Captain Spirifort and Lieutenant Canovas, with her daughter, and the captain seemed so struck with the wondrous beauty of the latter that he begged her hand for the first dance.

"You had another officer with you when I was taken ill?" said the mother, addressing Spirifort.

"Yes, good lady—my first lieutenant; he, too, has been taken suddenly ill and has retired!" replied the captain.

"Is he, like yourself, a Spaniard?" she asked.

"We are all Spaniards who serve his Catholic Majesty on board the *Guerrero*!" was his reply.

"I am sorry he is ill. He will lose much enjoyment. The best society in this city is represented here to-night!"

"The ladies of your city are wondrously beautiful," said Spirifort.

"More so than those of Spain?" asked the lady, archly.

She had spoken in Spanish all the time, and so purely that he knew her nativity.

"It were scarcely gallant to say so in your presence, señora—but your daughter, I was told by the mayor, was born here!"

"True, but she has Spanish blood in her veins for all that!" replied the lady.

"Yes—for I recognized you, fair lady, as an *Andalusian* by your accent when you first addressed me!"

"Yes, I was born in Andalusia. My child, like her father, who died here, was born in Baltimore!"

"No fairer flower ever graced the halls of beauty!" said the captain. "You should be proud of your treasure, señora!"

"I am proud of her purity, her goodness of heart, her nobility of soul, captain. In those qualities even her beauty is excelled."

"Happy will be the man who can win her love!" he continued.

"Sad to me will be the hour when she knows another love than that which binds her now to me!"

The captain had now to yield to some new introductions, but soon the music sounded for dancing to commence and he hurried to claim the fairest girl in all the company as his partner.

Hidden in a curtained alcove stood one whose face paled and flushed by turns, as in agony he beheld that lovely form whirled along in a giddy waltz by one whom he knew as the foulest fiend that ever wore the name of man. He saw that scarred face bend down to speak low-toned words of compliment to one too pure for such foul contact. And he knew when he saw the black eyes of his chief burning with fiery passion, that he who never loved but to destroy, was looking with insatiate eyes on one he would if possible make his victim.

"It shall not be! She and—my mother, too, shall be warned, if he does not turn his attention from her to others. I know the peril which environs all whom he approaches. Accursed be my folly in ever thinking of bringing him hither!"

And Marvel fairly writhed in agony, though he dared not risk a second meeting with his mother. If she should recognize him, as he feared, from what he was certain must be a close resemblance to his father—how could he account for his years of absence and silence—ab-

sence from those whom he was in all honor bound to love and protect.

It was almost maddening for him to be so near to them—to see them, know them, and yet not dare to speak: the better thoughts which their presence gave birth to—to see the peril of the good and beautiful girl whom the pirate chief seemed so determined to please, and yet not dare to snatch her from his polluting touch.

Yet until the fête broke up, he remained near enough to watch his relatives, and not until he had seen them enter their carriage to be taken home, did he show himself to his chief, who was now ready enough to return to the brigantine, since the charms of the night, for him, had passed away.

"Ah, *camarado mio*! You know not what you have missed! I have had a glorious time. My eyes have reveled on brighter charms than they ever saw before!" cried Spirifort, as Marvel rode gloomily by his side toward the landing.

Marvel made no reply. He hardly dared trust himself to speak. But Canovas now put his oar in.

"Our captain, ever a conqueror, has been conquered himself, I think," he said. "One fairy form seemed to chain him all the evening. One fair face gave him all the light he wanted."

"*Diablo!* yes! She is an angel!"

"Have you nothing to talk about but women?" cried Marvel, petulantly. "I saw more in the jewels they wore, of what would profit us, than the beauty you both rave about!"

"True, there were jewels enough for a king's ransom," said Spirifort. "Before we leave we may win both beauty and wealth as well! It would be rare to swoop down with fifty of our braves on such a bevy and let each bear away a decorated beauty in his arms. The diamonds would make one of our richest ocean prizes look small!"

Marvel made no reply to this idea—so like to Spirifort. He only felt that no such action should be taken there, if it cost his life to prevent it.

It was near morning when they all returned on board the brigantine, and Spirifort and his lieutenant, Canovas, retired to rest, wearied with pleasure.

But till day dawned, and long after, Marvel strode to and fro on deck, trying to think out some plan of action to save those over whom his heart thrilled with an affection which had long been cold, for he knew how soulless, how utterly callous to honor or feeling Spirifort was, and to tell his story and plead for those he would save, might only hasten the doom he sought to save his sister from.

He could form but two plans. One, to warn them by letter to fly the city for a certain time, from a fearful impending and overshadowing peril. But how to do this, preserve his own secret of relationship and induce belief which would make them leave the city and fly their danger, his mind, so long used to evil, could not compass.

The other, full of peril to himself as well as to his comrades, was secretly to inform the authorities of the real character of the pretended man-of-war and thus force Spirifort to fly or remain to be overwhelmed by the guns of a powerful fort and the force yet nearer at hand, in the sloop-of-war.

He determined at least to try the first plan before risking the last alternative.

Carefully disguising his style—for his handwriting was well known to Spirifort, should the latter ever see the letter—he wrote as follows:

"TO MADAME IGNESE RIDGEWOOD:—

"All unknown to you, a fearful peril, worse than death, hovers over you and your pure daughter Sadie. There is but one way of escape. Leave the city at once and go far from the coast for at least one month. This is no false alarm. Every hour is danger—if you delay. The eye of lawless passion has fallen on your peerless child, and one who shrinks at no obstacle has sworn to possess her."

"Go in the name of your dead husband—go and save your daughter's honor and her life!"

"One who knows and loves you well—but dares not reveal his name or position now."

Marvel wrote this in his own state-room and at an early hour next morning went on shore in the market-boat and posted it.

He made as an excuse for his trip a purchase of some underclothing, and returned with the boat in time to breakfast with his captain.

Spirifort rose late, but sleep had taken away all fatigue. He was in high spirits and talked incessantly of their grand reception and the pleasure he had enjoyed at the ball. It was so new, so fresh, so different from the coarse debaucheries which he had indulged in to satiation.

After breakfast he asked Marvel to go ashore with him.

"Madame, or she should be called *Señora* Ridgewood, whose daughter was the crowning beauty of the ball, gave me her card, and as a Spaniard from *Andalusia* said I would ever be welcome with my officers at her house!"

"But you are not from *Andalusia*; you have often told me you were born at Tortuga, in the Caribbean Sea!"

"True—but she was born in Andalusia, and I claimed to be her countryman, and it set me ahead wonderfully in her good graces. And it

is a good plan to stand well with the mother when you would woo the daughter. Ah, Marvel—she is a beauty. The only woman I ever saw that I think could hold my faith for a week. Come—go ashore with me and see for yourself. Your sudden and strange illness last night threw you off from pleasure's course; but it is not too late yet. I have half a dozen calls to make if time admits."

"Captain—you or I should remain on board all the time. Tho' all looks fair now, and safe, there is no hour for us without danger. Some of our men may drink too deeply and make idle boasts that would put us all in peril!"

"Ay—they might, but well they know death would repay the folly!"

"What were one or a dozen deaths to the danger that would rise the instant our true character is known? I repeat—the schooner should never be left without some one able to put her in instant order for battle or for flight."

"You are right, Marvel, and I am wrong and careless. I will go on shore alone, and I'll sing your praises to my charmer, so you'll be received graciously when in your turn you visit her. Ah—if we could stay here a year I would not begrudge the time. But we must make a short stay or the crew will grow restless. This life will be too tame for them, though it rests us!"

Spirifort dressed himself with exceeding elegance, and having his boat manned went on shore.

And Marvel, knowing whither he was going had only to wait with tremulous suspense to learn how his plan to save the pure and innocent should succeed.

For bad as he was, the ties of blood had not been broken, and the sight of his mother and sister had brought out in full force all that was left of good in his nature.

Walking the quarter-deck, occupied in thought, he had not noticed a sea-going steamer coming up the bay until its close approach caused him to raise his eyes.

Then he saw on its bridge a man among three who stood there who seemed strangely excited. He was pointing to the disguised pirate and gesticulating, while he spoke loudly—so loudly that Marvel plainly heard him say:

"It is the same vessel—I can swear it is! Her rig is altered, but I would know her sharp hull among ten thousand, even though her figure-head is gone and she is brigantine-rigged!"

The man who spoke had the weather-bronzed face of a seaman, and his dress was that usually worn by officers of merchantmen.

The steamer swept by, steering for the inner harbor next the city, while Marvel, not for an instant doubting that the man who seemed to have recognized the schooner was one of those who had been saved from the ship burned off the Florida coast, knew what a deadly peril they would be placed in if the man gave the alarm on shore, before they could get out from under the guns of the fort and sloop-of-war.

Hurriedly writing a note to recall the captain, he sent it on shore by a trusty man in the fastest boat, bidding him recall every man on shore as quickly as it could be done.

Then—quietly, avoiding all excitement, he got the crew astir, and made every possible arrangement for getting under way quickly.

He had sails loosed, as if to air and dry them; he saw to the mooring of the vessel, and had the cable run in as short as the vessel could lie with, and had a shackle in the chain unriveted and made ready for slipping at a second's notice.

His note to Spirifort had been brief, but full of meaning.

"You are wanted on board *instantly*, on a matter that is life or death to us all. Delay not one moment."

MARVEL."

CHAPTER XI.

THE SUDDEN RECALL.

DRESSED in his elegant uniform, his breast blazing with jeweled insignia, Spirifort, as a Spanish noble and the captain of a Spanish man-of-war, attracted much attention as he passed up the streets of Baltimore after landing. It was flattering to the vanity of the disguised pirate, for he, like all of human kind, had vanity, to be so noticed; but he had an object stronger than the attracting of popular notice. He hurried on until he reached the street and number on the card which he had received from Mrs. Ridgewood, and soon was seated in her elegant parlor in the presence of that lady and her lovely daughter.

His uniform sat well on his tall, almost gigantic figure, and the orders which blazed over his ample chest added to his distinguished appearance.

Even the scar that would have looked repulsive on the face of a civilian, seemed but a mark of heroism to one in uniform, whose profession was warlike and full of danger.

The captain was in high spirits. All his plans seemed working well. The widow appeared to be rejoiced to meet a countryman from her native land, as she believed the captain to be, and though her beautiful daughter did not imitate her in enthusiasm, she was cordially polite. And to the wonder of Spirifort, in the plain

morning robe of snowy muslin which she wore, she seemed even more beautiful than she had appeared at the ball, elegantly dressed for that occasion.

His compliments were given with true Spanish warmth, and, unused though she was to such open admiration, the fair girl could but be flattered by the fact that he who had sailed the wide world over, and who came, as she and her mother believed, from a land where beauty is a heritage, should declare with blunt honesty he had never before in all his life seen so fair a face or a form so peerless.

Wishing to change the theme, Mrs. Ridgewood asked how the officer was doing who had been taken ill at the ball.

"He is better—*much* better!" said the captain. "On my next visit to your delightful home, I will surely bring him with me!"

"Do, kind captain!" said Mrs. Ridgewood. "It seems strange, but there was a look in his face and form that reminded me of one who was very dear to me, who has long since passed to the better world!"

A servant entered at this moment and handed the lady a letter which he said had just been brought by the city postman.

The lady glanced at the superscription, saw it was addressed to herself, and instantly opened it.

Her cheek paled when she read its contents, and, without thinking that one almost a stranger was present, she exclaimed:

"A warning of danger! What can it mean?"

"Danger, dear mamma—danger from whence? Surely you, who are so good and kind, cannot have an enemy in the world!"

"Cielo! If she has, it will be my delight to dispose of him!" cried the captain. "Pray, señora, tell me what is the danger you are warned of, so that I can serve you if it be in the power of man!"

"Alas! the danger, if there be truth in this warning, is the most fearful I could dread—but no names are given; I do not know the writer, or whom he can allude to. My daughter knows but few men, and those are high-toned and honorable—the first in society!"

"Does the letter concern me, my dear mother?" asked Sadie.

"Yes—child—I will read it aloud, and the brave captain can judge for himself if it is not calculated to give us both alarm and mistrust!"

And she read the startling missive.

"Let me see it, please!" said the captain, mastering a sudden tremor, for he felt that the writer meant a thrust at himself.

His real reason was to see if he could recognize the handwriting. But Marvel had foreseen this danger and had disguised his usual chirography.

"An anonymous letter is never to be trusted—much less should it create alarm! A true friend would name not only the peril, but the source from which it should come!" he said, calmly, as he refolded the letter and handed it back to Mrs. Ridgewood. "You surely must know all who have approached your lovely child, and if there are any who bear evil names, why, it is easy to be on your guard!"

"Ah, Señor Capitano, I have said that we associate with none but people of the highest character. I cannot, for my life, understand the meaning of this singular letter. As to leaving the city, where we have friends to watch over and protect us—that is not to be thought of in connection with a merely anonymous warning!"

This conversation was broken in upon by the entrance of the servant a second time, who brought a letter for Captain Spirifort, saying that the bearer, a sailor from his vessel, was at the door, and an immediate answer was wanted.

The captain tore the letter open and his face paled and flushed with wonder, not unmixed with anger.

"It is a day of annoying mysteries!" he cried. "My first lieutenant, the same who was taken ill at the Mayor's Ball, has sent for me on board. I fear the crew are giving him trouble. They wanted liberty to come on shore in a body to enjoy themselves, and I only allowed a few to leave at a time. His note is so urgent that I must go at once, and the happiness I was enjoying in this delightful company must end. But I hope soon to see you again. Till then, dear ladies, I shall be in darkness."

And rising, he kissed their hands in true Spanish style and bowing, left the house.

"Andrea—what is the matter?" he asked, as he hurried down Calvert street with the sailor—one of his most trusty men.

"I do not know, captain. The lieutenant has got alarmed since a steamer came in from the South, passing us close aboard."

"Before I got ashore, the signal was at the fore, recalling all our men, and four guns were fired to call it to their notice. I met the boat-swain and told him to hurry them up."

"Diablo! Can our true character have been discovered? If so—every plan I've made is upset! But to sea I'll never, never go without the prize I've laid my plans to capture!"

Hastening to the wharf, he found two boats in waiting, one for himself and the other for such of the crew as were on shore, and looking off saw his vessel with her sails all loose and ready for

hoisting, while the well-known signal of recall was flying from the fore-truck.

Springing into his gig with Andrea at the tiller and six good men at the oars, he pushed off just as the absentees came hurrying into the other boat, and rapidly they dashed toward their vessel.

"What is the matter? Why are our sails loose? Are you crazy?" was Spirifort's cry, when he reached his deck.

"Do you see three boats leaving the Government wharf, near the Custom House landing?" was Marvel's reply. "I will stake my life one heads for the fort, another for the sloop-of-war, and the third for us! Some cursed busybody has recognized us in spite of our disguise, and the sooner we are under way and out of gunshot of our natural enemies the better for us!"

"Diablo! I believe you are right. Those are revenue men in uniform!" said Spirifort, looking at the three boats through a spy-glass. "But I am not ready to go to sea yet. If it was only night, I could yet carry out my wishes!"

"Look!—one boat heads for the fort, as I feared it would!" cried Marvel. "If we delay ten minutes we will be sunk by the huge guns on yonder ramparts."

"You are right. Hook on the boats and run them up! Sheet home and hoist away every sail. Slip the cable as the sails fill! It is well we have a fresh breeze from the west!"

Never before had that pirate crew worked more earnestly or used more haste. The canvas already flapping in the wind rose swiftly on the masts and was sheeted home below and aloft. The splash of the iron chain as the shackle-bolt was drawn told that the vessel was free from her moorings.

And while the three barges carrying the Revenue flag were dashing down the harbor at their best speed, the sharp bows of the brigantine turned seaward and she darted away with a wall of foam under her prow.

CHAPTER XII.

IN FULL FLIGHT.

"My mother, the same hand which wrote that letter of warning, though using disguise, wrote this note which the Spanish captain dropped in his haste as he went out!"

Thus cried Sadie Ridgewood as she compared the two letters.

"They are written on paper that is just alike, the ink is the same shade. And he—the captain—said the last note was written by his first lieutenant—the very officer whom you saw at the ball and who was taken so suddenly and strangely ill! It is very mysterious!" she continued. "Can it be possible he has warned us of danger from his captain, whom he must certainly know well?"

"Heaven knows. Surely he seemed to speak and act like a friend—this captain, and if he were a bad man he could not have attained rank and high honors!" said the mother.

"I know not. Time will tell. At any rate we can now be on our guard, and if he returns watch closely for his motives in visiting us so early after an introduction. He said this was his first friendly visit on shore since the ball, where he was introduced to so many!"

While Sadie was speaking she was closely examining and comparing the writing in the two letters.

"Mother, dear," she said at last, "have you not in your *escritoire* the last letter written by my brother when he went to sea in the ship that was never heard of afterward?"

"Yes, dear child; I have treasured it as a memento of my brave boy lost to us forever!"

"Let me see it, please. I have a strange fancy that the handwriting here, especially in the last note, is such as I have seen before!"

The widow hurried to her chamber and brought to her daughter a letter browned by age and worn by many a perusal.

Carefully, laying the three letters side by side on a table near the window, mother and daughter compared them. And with expressions of wonder they found them so much alike that both exclaimed:

"They were written by the same hand—all three. In the capital letters especially the resemblance was traced!"

The widow trembled from head to foot.

"It was no illusion!" she cried. "When I fainted at the ball it was because I thought I saw the face and form of your dear dead father before me. The officer I saw was so like him that for a moment I felt as if your father had returned to earth and stood before me. The officer too seemed so confused, and when I tried to speak I lost all consciousness. When I was restored he was gone, and they said he had returned to his ship—ill! He has avoided us since. Sadie—I believe that officer to be your brother—preserved, we know not how, for in childhood he bore a marked resemblance to his father."

"If it was he, my mother, why should he not make himself known and return to us?"

"I cannot comprehend it, child. But I must see him! He has written this letter of warning—in it he says:

"One who *knows* and *loves* you well, but dares not reveal his name or position now."

"It is strange, and now I think of it, I re-

member a young man in uniform passing our house slowly the very day the Spanish man-of-war arrived, and looking at me so earnestly that I turned away angry at what seemed to be impertinence."

"Was he very tall and dark, a heavy mustache on his lips?"

"Yes, mother."

"It was he—it was *your* brother and *my* son, and he is enveloped in some strange mystery. We must penetrate it! Order out our carriage. I am going to the wharf nearest the anchorage. I cannot rest until I see that officer, him who signs his name Marvel—but whom the captain called Marbello. Order the carriage and we will go at once!"

In a little while the lady and her daughter were being driven toward the wharf which she had named to her driver. While on the way the report of cannon was heard, seeming to come from the direction of Fort McHenry and from vessels in the bay. And great excitement was observed in the faces of people hurrying toward the water-front of the city.

At last, observing a merchant among the throng whom she knew, Mrs. Ridgewood caused her carriage to stop, and calling to the gentleman, asked him what all the excitement was about.

To her horror she received this reply:

"The vessel supposed to be a Spanish man-of-war has turned out to be a notorious pirate from Southern seas. She was recognized by the captain and officers of a ship on which they were left to perish by fire—the passengers and money having been carried off by the pirate. She is trying to escape now and is being fired upon by the fort and pursued by the sloop-of-war which was fortunately in our harbor. We have been feting pirates, it seems, instead of Spanish naval officers, and it serves us right, for our people are ever ready to go wild after any foreign celebrity, while they pay little attention to the officers of their own nation!"

The lady sunk back in her carriage, almost fainting.

"A pirate!" she moaned. "Sadie—I see it all. Yours has indeed been a narrow escape. That poor boy has been rescued from a ship destroyed—forced into the company of the destroyers and is now placed where he dare not try to extricate himself. The warning from him proves that while he loves us, he could not see the eyes of lawless passion fall on your pure form, and that he did what he could to save you ere it was too late. A PIRATE! Heaven help him! What can we do?"

The carriage had by this time reached the wharf, which was crowded by excited citizens. Two sailors in uniform had been captured who belonged to the pirate, and had been left in consequence of her departure.

Terror-stricken at their arrest they had already confessed to the officers who held them that they belonged to the brigantine, whose white sails could be seen far down the bay, and that she was a pirate.

Beyond reach of the guns from the fort, which had not opened in time to check her flight, but still pursued by the sloop-of-war under all the sail she could set, the brigantine was rushing down the bay at her best speed, a fair and fresh wind on her quarter driving her fast away from the peril which had so lately environed her.

"We have been fearfully deceived!" said the mayor of the city, approaching and speaking to Mrs. Ridgewood, as she sat with her daughter in their carriage near the water-side. "The man whom we received and honored as a Spanish nobleman, turns out to be a pirate—one of the most daring and notorious that ever sailed upon the ocean. Finding his vessel recognized, by quick and skillful action he has escaped from under the guns of our fort and a man-of-war, but we hope the latter will yet overtake him, as she is in hot chase now! It is wonderful—how they managed to deceive the consul, our naval officers and myself. It has taught us all a lesson—one which we will never forget."

The lady hardly dared trust herself with a reply she was so full of agitation.

But her daughter asked the mayor how the recognition came about, and the deception discovered.

"The captain of a vessel which had been first deceived by her as a Mexican privateer, and who had seen the vessel close aboard, when she put a pretended passenger on his ship, recognized the vessel when he came in on a Southern steamer. He informed the collector of the port, and measures were being taken to cut off the escape of the pirate when her officers took the alarm. Almost as quick as thought she was seen getting under way, and before the fort and sloop-of-war received the news, she was under canvas and making her escape. That settled all doubt as to her character, and the capture of two of her crew left on shore confirms every suspicion, and the statement of the captain who knew her the moment his eyes glanced at her hull!"

"Do you think she will escape to sea?" asked Mrs. Ridgewood at last.

"It looks so now. You can barely see her sails, while the sloop-of-war is distinctly in view. The latter must be losing ground. She has

ceased firing her cannon most likely because the other is out of gunshot!"

The widow sighed, and bade the driver turn the carriage homeward. It was a relief to her to feel that the pirate had escaped, for if the lieutenant was really her son as she supposed, she could not bear the thought of his being captured.

Again when they got home did they scan those letters closely, and the more they thought the more surely were they convinced that a son and a brother had written all three, and that by some dread mystery he was held to a life the most dreadful that imagination could depict. His middle name was there—Edward "*Marvel*" Ridgewood.

CHAPTER XIII.

DANGER AHEAD AND ASTERN!

OWING mainly to the rapid preparations made by Marvel while waiting for Spirifort and the crew, the pirate captain had scarcely got a glance at the revenue boats through his glass before his own vessel was under headway.

He had time to recognize the collector of the port and the Spanish consul in one of the boats, and the others were full of men, undoubtedly bent on learning his true character.

Not knowing if all the crew were on board, all that could be done was to crowd sail and get beyond the reach of the heavy rifled guns on the fort and the heavy batteries of the sloop-of-war as soon as possible before they could be alarmed by signal or direct communication with the boats.

With a ten-knot breeze, well aft, the pirate headed down the bay, still carrying the Spanish flag aloft and her officers and crew in uniform. But her guns were cast loose, loaded and double-shotted—her magazine and arm-chests were opened, everything got ready for action, for if escape should be cut off the pirate well knew that death was their only alternative beyond victory.

Little else was said than giving orders to sail-trimmers and the helmsman until fire was opened, first from the sloop-of-war and next from the fort upon the swift-receding fugitive.

Spirifort laughed when the first shot from the sloop-of-war dropped in the water almost half a mile astern, but when a huge shell came shrieking from the fort and dropped in the water almost under the bow of his vessel, his face wore a graver, uglier look.

"A league—if it is a fathom!" he muttered.

"Bear away three points at the helm, there; we must have luck or they'll hit us yet before we are out of range!"

Even as he spoke another huge shell struck the water just astern—so close that its spray actually flew on board.

But every second told in favor of the pirate, as she almost flew under all the canvas her spars could hold, and the next shot from the fort fell almost a cable's length short of the mark.

By this time the sloop-of-war was under canvas, firing uselessly from her bow-chasers, but crowding sail in chase. What her speed would be compared with the Diablocito was yet to be seen—but Spirifort had little fear on that head. He had never yet found a match for his craft when she had clear water and a stiff breeze.

For the next half-hour he was silent and watchful, but at the end of that time he saw that he was leaving the sloop-of-war hand over hand and the fort had ceased firing for he was far out of range of the best guns there.

Now the crew were mustered and it was found that two were absent.

"If they are discovered in uniform and captured, they will tell all they know if they think they can save their lives by it!" muttered the pirate chief to Marvel.

"If they are not under the influence of drink they may get other clothing and escape detection. As it is, this coast will be too hot for us now!"

"Yet I will not leave it until I have taught these haughty citizens a lesson!" said Spirifort, sullenly. "We surely can find some hiding-place along the coast where we can remain unseen for a time till the excitement blows over and then—then in some other shape we can go back and gather in some of the riches they have so lavishly displayed. And, more than that—there is a treasure there which I have sworn shall be *my own*—the fair girl in whose bright presence I was basking when your note warning me of danger came!"

"Not a harbor on the coast will serve to conceal our craft now!" said Marvel, almost fiercely. "Would you risk all our lives and treasures for a woman's smile? This bold act of ours will be blazoned over all the land almost with the speed of light, and every war-hound in their navy will be put on our track. Rather let us seek some remote sea where we have not yet been heard of. There we can safely win new victories, find new pleasures and a safety we can never know in these latitudes!"

"Are you getting cowardly, Mr. Marvel?"

"If you think so, Captain Spirifort, heave your schooner up in the wind and let that sloop-of-war close with us. I will not object!"

"She carries double our crew and thrice our weight of metal!"

"Courage does not count *odds*, Captain Spirifort. You seem to doubt mine—I am willing to have it tested! Shall I shorten sail?"

"No, Marvel, no—I did but jest! I know thou art brave as the bravest! Stand on, and when we are at sea, out of sight of enemies, we will lay our plans. I have much to speak of. Short time as we were in that city I made at least one jealous enemy. Señora Ridgewood received a letter in my presence warning her of danger to her fair daughter's honor. And the shaft was flown at me. She did not so understand it. But I did, and had not this new danger come upon us I would have sought out the author of the warning and written his doom with the point of my dagger!"

"On deck, there! Ahoy! Two large, square-rigged craft coming up the bay; look like men-of-war!" shouted the second officer, who had gone up to the fore-cross-trees on the lookout.

"Keep the crew at quarters! Mayhap signals have been flashed down the bay to bring enemies in our way. If so, we have no choice but to fight our way to sea or perish here!"

Spirifort said this with his old natural fire. Danger seemed to strengthen the manhood in his nature.

Marvel made no reply. With a glance through his glass astern he saw that the sloop-of-war was yet in chase, but now almost hull down—too far astern to show a signal to the incoming craft—let them be what they might.

Then he went forward and took a long and careful look at the vessels that were coming up the bay. Both were close-hauled, and on a course which would take them but a little way to the starboard of the Diablocito, if she held her course. They were hull up, and in less than ten minutes Marvel reported to his captain a frigate with two tiers of guns on broadside and a heavy brig-of-war.

"Can you see their colors?" asked Spirifort.

"Yes—one flag at least is plain. It is that of the United States. The other—that of the frigate—is French or Spanish. I cannot tell which yet."

"Lower away our colors. We will not show any till we know which is best to use. They cannot make ours out till they are astern of us anyway!" cried Spirifort. Then, raising his voice for all to hear, he shouted:

"Men—stand to your guns, and be ready for fight or flight. If these craft have been signaled in any way they may make hot work for us. But if they hold no suspicion, we soon will spread our wings on a clear sea, and head for safer waters. Be steady—our luck may yet be good."

Swiftly now the Diablocito and the strange craft closed in. The latter two were not a half-mile apart, the American brig-of-war leading; the frigate heading a little more to leeward. The decks of both showed large crews, and as they rose and fell on the long, rolling waves, the muzzles of their heavy guns could be seen outside their port-holes, as if ready for instant use.

The Diablocito was kept on her course, heading straight down the bay, seeming not to seek or avoid the in-bound cruisers.

Yet every man on her deck, from Spirifort down, knew his peril. The strangers would pass—if they passed, within musket-shot of their vessel.

Nearer and nearer, until Spirifort saw plainly that the frigate flew the royal flag of Spain and carried an admiral's pennant at her main.

"Hoist the English flag!" he cried. "Ho—Marvel—you take command; the brig is heaving about, and will speak us! You must answer the hail! Stand every man to his quarters!"

CHAPTER XIV.

ON A NEW TACK.

BREATHLESS with excitement, used as they were to peril, the pirates stood to arms, and waiting, watched the swift-changing scene.

The brig-of-war, a heavy, well-armed vessel, hove about swiftly and was handled in masterly style, her yards and sheets trimmed on the other tack with marvelous quickness.

Her course, as she fell away, would bring her just across the wake of the Diablocito, in easy hailing distance. The frigate kept on her course, but that was in half-gunshot at the furthest.

"Cool, now! Not a word from any one but me!" said Marvel, sternly, as he took a trumpet in his hand, ready to answer the hail that he knew was coming from an officer who stood on the lee quarter of the brig.

"Brigantine ahoy! What name, where from and whither bound?" shouted the American officer, his brig luffing up to lessen her headway.

"His Britannic Majesty's brigantine Spiffire, last from Baltimore; bound to Bermuda to join the fleet. What brig is that?"

"United States brig Enterprise, bound to Annapolis from a cruise!" came the reply, and the brig filled away on her course.

"Safe! Old Nick favors his children!" muttered Marvel, drawing an easy breath as he threw down his trumpet. "If those fools speak the sloop-of-war which still holds in chase, they'll be madder than hornets to think we've given them all the slip!"

The crew were now called from quarters and

the regular watch set so as to give one watch a chance for rest. But a bright lookout was still kept below and aloft, for well Fire Feather knew he was never out of peril.

Had telegraphy then been known as now, he would have found his way to sea barred by every man-of-war in the fleet which almost always lay at Norfolk or in Hampton Roads. But no such system was then in existence.

With the wind freshening until the topsails were reefed down, the pirate swept out to sea, steering by chart until the capes at the mouth of the Chesapeake were astern, and not till then did either Marvel or Spirifort suggest a point of destination.

As the brig swept out for a good offing, both the captain and Marvel went below to look over their charts and think of a course to steer.

"What say you to a run on the English coast, or that of France and England combined?" asked Marvel, most anxious to get out of American waters speedily.

"An ocean three thousand miles to cross before we can make a port if we want to? Our provisions are too short for that. We had to leave before we filled up as we intended!" said Spirifort. "We might sail to the far northern coast of this country, beyond their large harbors, and at some of the islands lay in meat, bread and water, or on our way capture some vessels from which to provision!"

"True! Then we'll stretch out to the Gulf Stream and once in it head to the northward till we are beyond the rule of the sharp-eyed denizens of the States. Up on the Canadian coast there are ports where fishing-fleets are fitted out that men-of-war never look into, and if we do not find what we want sooner, we'll take it there!"

Marvel was satisfied if he could keep his leader away from the coast below until some new fancy entered his always fickle mind. For, bad as he was, he had renewed the love of his childhood for those so near to him by blood, and hard as the thought was that he might never see them more, it would have been far more terrible to have them imperiled by one whose nature he knew to be fiendish in every sense.

Not heeding in the least the coasters and pilots who were coming and going off the mouth of the great bay, Fire Feather shaped his course north-north-east as soon as he got his desired offing. Marvel, as navigator, took distance and departure from the nearest cape, and then under easy sail they moved along swiftly and smoothly.

And now, all uniforms laid aside, the crew dressed as before, and once more Spirifort assumed his plumed hat and looked the dashing pirate that he was. A lookout, ever aloft by day and forward on deck at night, kept the officers warned of every sail when seen, and many a craft might have been overhauled and taken had they chosen, but the plan was to let the commerce of the coast wisely alone until they got far away from the scene of their last exploits and dangers.

When the pirate left the bay, sails were in sight in every direction, but next morning only here and there a white speck in the far distance gave a sign that other than the Diablocito were afloat.

Soon after day dawned the square yards were sent down from aloft, the huge lug foresail was bent, and the schooner was restored to her old rig—a fore and after, with a huge squaresail to hoist when running before the wind. Their course now brought them up on a wind, sheets nearly close-hauled. And this was their best point of sailing. The crew unused to passing so many vessels without overhauling any would have shown signs of discontent had not Marvel, their most popular officer, told them of the hot search that was being made for them by men-of-war of all nations and the necessity of keeping quiet until the search was less vigorous. This contented most of them, but among so many lawless, desperate ruffians there were some who were never satisfied except in either carousal or carnage.

Keeping outside the track of coasters, and merely crossing the great routes to Europe, the schooner was not thrown in the immediate vicinity of any great temptation, though they sighted many of the huge line ships that then carried the bulk of freight and passengers. The sea was not then as now almost covered with huge steamships.

Only once did Spirifort approach land before he passed the latitude of Halifax. This was on the coast of Maine when the schooner was so nearly out of water that the impatient crew had been reduced to short allowance.

He then headed for a high wooded cape, where a stream of fresh water entered the sea, and spent half a day in taking in wood and water.

While the main part of the crew were thus engaged, Marvel took a half-dozen trusty men and went inland a mile or two where he came upon a flock of fine sheep that fed unguarded on the wild grasses which grew rank and rich in the salty air of the coast.

Killing a fine fat one for each man to carry, the animals were dressed and taken on board, making a glorious feast for men long used to salted meats and only the fresh fish they caught by trolling with lines astern. Though they

sighted some fishing craft along the coast the pirates held no communication with them nor offered any injury.

CHAPTER XV.

MARVEL'S MARVEL.

WHEN the United States man-of-war brig was met in the bay by the sloop-of-war, and her captain learned that he had been deceived by the audacious pirate under English colors a brief consultation was held between the officers, to which the Spanish admiral was invited, his frigate being hove to on seeing a signal from the sloop-of-war.

The frigate, a fine double-banked craft of sixty guns, was one of the fastest in the Spanish navy, and it was at once settled that all three vessels should go in chase of the pirate, following her if it was possible to learn her course.

Meantime, in Baltimore there was a tremendous feeling of indignation. The municipal authorities, as well as the officers of the United States, had been duped into honoring pirates and murderers, feasting and fêting them at great expense, allowing their wives and daughters to dance and flirt with them, and the daily press almost maddened them with jeers and taunts. Nothing on earth could have added to their humiliation and mortification.

In the home of Mrs. Ridgewood there were many tearful consultations between mother and daughter. Convinced in their own minds that by some strange fatuity the son and brother was an officer on the piratical vessel, they dared not speak of it to another, and yet they wished, if it were within the bounds of human possibilities, to rescue him from his terrible situation.

In a short time the news reached town by a pilot-boat that the escaping pirate, flying the English flag, had actually spoken an incoming American man-of-war, and run within musket-shot of a heavy Spanish two-decker, whose single broadside, if opened, could have sunk her ere she sailed twice her length.

This audacity seemed to be beyond belief, but it was too well attested to be doubted.

There was some hope that the vessel would yet be overhauled and captured, for all three of the men-of-war named had gone after her, learning the course she steered when leaving the Capes, and the authorities at Norfolk, where several men-of-war were in port, had been notified.

Standing up the coast, hailing every vessel which they could sight and overhaul for news, the men-of-war sailed on in their unavailing search.

Where—where was the famed Diablocito now?

Well supplied once more with wood and water, the crew refreshed and more contented, Spirifort bore away for the coast of Labrador.

It was now in the height of summer, so that his men could endure and enjoy the colder yet pleasant climate of that coast during the brief stay which he meant to make there. With Marvel he had decided to lay the vessel on a convenient beach where the tides were so light she could be beached at half-tide, left dry at low water, and floated again when the flood-tide made. She had been so long out of dock that her bottom needed looking to and cleaning, for her speed had evidently lessened within a few months from its old rate.

One lovely day, with the white sails of a large fleet of fishing-sloops and schooners visible along the banks, the pirate schooner headed into the great inlet of Iructoke on the coast of Labrador. To men used to the palmy and flowery foliage of the South, the cedar, birch and spruce of the northern forest looked strange, but the air was mild and pure, and they were told they could have all the exercise and relaxation on shore they wanted for a change.

A small hamlet of houses owned by people engaged in fishing and sailing, and a few stores, was all that met the eye in the shape of civilization. Indians in their rude wigwams, or darting over the waters in their canoes of birch bark were plentiful, and the pirates were as much taken with them as anything else they saw. They brought venison, fish and wild berries to the vessel, and plenty reigned where scarcity had been the rule.

Here there were no officials to scrutinize the papers of the strange vessel or to ask annoying questions, and for once the pirates felt safe from annoyance.

Landing the heavy guns and sending down his upper spars, Spirifort began his preparations for a complete overhauling of his craft below and aloft. He had run into the inlet under Mexican colors, and the officers and crew were directed to represent the craft as a Mexican privateer, taking a northern cruise to rest and recuperate a crew worn down by Southern heat and hard service.

As the tide had a rise and fall of nearly forty feet, the schooner, shored up by her spars, could be laid high and dry on the hard beach when the tide was out, so to clean and repair her coppered bottom was as easy as if she had been laid up in a dry dock.

And to this work all hands were kept until the vessel was once more as good as new aloft and below, in hull, spars and rigging.

Lieutenant Marvel superintended all this work,

for Captain Spirifort had been morose and gloomy ever since they left Baltimore, only keeping his spirits up by pouring spirits down—scarcely ever leaving his cabin and making no acquaintances on shore.

After the schooner, completely refitted, was ready for sea, Marvel, with Spirifort's consent, engaged from the Indians a large supply of smoked venison hams, and from the Canadian inhabitants of the hamlet a supply of salted and dried fish.

Learning that the priest who officiated in the neat chapel back of the hamlet, lived with a brother, who came from France, where he owned large estates, Marvel made a visit to the mansion attached to the chapel on the hill.

Here he met Father Duprét, the Priest of the Mission, and by him was introduced to his brother Alphonse, the elder of the two, who, out of love for his brother, shared his almost recluse life on that bleak coast which was inaccessible for nearly eight months in the year—an icy barrier lining the coast and deep snows making travel overland almost impossible except to the agile and handy natives on their snow-shoes.

During the summer, every two weeks a small mail-packet arrived from the St. Lawrence, bringing goods needed at the little stores in the hamlet and other supplies for the long and dreary winter which lay before the few people that wintered there.

Alphonse was a refined and intelligent gentleman, speaking English almost as well as his native language, and Marvel was delighted to meet such an intelligent man amid such wild and lonely surroundings. But a new surprise was in store for the young officer.

After he had been seated in the parlor of the manse a few moments, the priest having gone out to see a visitor in the Confessional, Alphonse Duprét rung a small silver bell which called a servant in.

"Bring cake and wine, and tell my daughter I wish to see her," said the old gentleman, as the servant appeared.

In a few moments Marvel heard the rustle of feminine garments and looking up as Monsieur Duprét said:

"Lieutenant, be pleased to know my only child, Ma'mselle Melisse," his eyes fell upon such a vision of loveliness as never had crossed his vision before.

Tall, with a form of exquisite grace, large expressive eyes, their tint a blue softly tending to gray, features of a Grecian cast and a look of unspeakable purity and modesty, it was no wonder that Marvel could hardly find words to utter when he found himself so suddenly in the presence of one so angelic in person.

He bowed low and felt that he blushed, while he thanked Monsieur Duprét for the honor of the introduction.

"I am but a rude sailor and all unused to the presence of ladies fair and gentle!" he said, when the wine and cake were tendered to him by her fair hands. "Once in the presence of a dear mother and a lovely sister, I knew what true happiness was, but now, inured to toil and danger those joys are only sweet memories."

"You must tell me all about your mother and sister!" said the lovely girl. "I am very lonely here, for I have no companions. The few people we see are very dull and ignorant, and only in books and my pretty garden do I find enjoyment, except in the company of my dear uncle and my good father. You must see my garden—it is at its loveliest now. Soon the autumn frosts will come, and then until another summer arrives it will be drear and desolate."

Thus, while Marvel and her father sipped the choice wine, the sweet girl filled the room with the rich harmony of her voice, and though his duty called him back to his vessel, the young lieutenant felt as if he could stay in her company a lifetime and never feel weary.

When at last he felt that he had prolonged his call more than a proper time for a stranger, he left, promising to renew his visit, urged to do so by both father and daughter, who seemed pleased to have met him.

Marvel did not speak of his new acquaintances when he went on board. He did not want the lawless gaze of Spirifort to fall on that fair girl—the emblem of purity and modest beauty. He almost felt as if it were a sacrilege for him to enter so pure a presence. And bad as he was, he knew that Spirifort was worse—a demon in human guise.

Being ready for sea, Spirifort began to grow more and more morose and ugly, when Marvel urged delay, pleading the necessity of laying in the meats and fish which the Indians were slowly bringing in—they being stores that could be had nowhere else and much prized by the crew, who had never before enjoyed such food.

Thus a week and more went by, and not a day passed in which Marvel did not visit his new-found friends, and each visit grew longer and more and more pleasant, until for him there was no light or joy except in the presence of the lovely blonde whose tresses of golden brown were to him chains of living beauty.

He had told her all about his early home, his fair and loving sister and his widowed mother from whom he had been drawn by the love of adventure, and she had woven over his soul

turn a spell of a nature so strong that he felt as if he could never part from her.

How she felt, he could but guess and hope. She had left France to lead this drear and desolate life while yet a mere child, and the companionship of a young man of fine talents, whose adventurous life was to her a romance, was calculated to arouse all the woman that there was in her ardent and impulsive nature. For he never had hinted at the darker side of his life; she did not dream that one who seemed to her to be the soul of manhood and chivalry could have a soul darkened with crime, a heart full of sin.

It was a new life to her and she gave herself up to a full enjoyment of it, not dreaming of a change to come, and to come dark and swift upon her.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PIRATE'S THREAT.

"JUMBO—you sable imp of blackness—where is Lieutenant Marvel? I have not seen him since he left the breakfast-table. Where is he—on deck?"

"Reckon not, sah! He done went ashore airly dis mornin' an' hasn't come back, I reckon, Mars' Cap'n!"

"On shore? It seems to me he spends a great deal of his time there!"

"He jess does, Mars' Cap'n!"

"Where does he go? What attraction can he find there?"

"He goes up to de big house dat belongs to de chapel. An' I reckon de 'traction, sah, am a purty French gal—so I hear one ob de men say dat carried up a basket o' books from Mars' Marbel's room!"

"A pretty French girl? He never told me he had any acquaintances on shore!" said the captain, his face darkening with an angry frown. "I'll see to this! Have my gig manned! Up at the big house on the hill, eh? I'll soon take the bearings there and see what is up."

Dressed in uniform, wearing a cap instead of his red-plumed hat, Captain Spirifort landed, and leaving his crew at the waterside to await his return to the boat he strode swiftly forward in the direction of the house on the hill.

As he approached it his eye noted the ornamental grounds, and he was striding toward the front entrance of the house, when his observant glance fell on two figures walking side by side in a lovely flower-garden to the right of the building.

One he instantly recognized as his lieutenant—the other was a female and he got but a glimpse of her as both passed into a bower of climbing roses where they were hidden from his view.

A low wall separated the garden from the path he was walking in. Over this the chief stepped lightly and cautiously advanced toward the bower. Little dreaming a spy was so near, Marvel was speaking to the lovely girl in a voice which was expressive of deep emotion.

"Soon, very soon, my dear Melisse," he said, "I shall be forced to leave you. Already my captain is impatient to go to sea, and I have invented every excuse in my power to prolong our stay. Do not weep, my darling—I will not be absent long. As soon as I can break away from my present engagement, I will return to you; your good uncle shall unite us in marriage, and I will bear you away to the sunny home in Baltimore, where my dear mother and sister will welcome you with loving hearts and clinging arms as one to be cherished tenderly forever!"

"Baltimore! His mother and sister?" muttered the pirate chief, while his face grew dark with passion. "Ha! I see it all. The secret is out! The mother fainted when she met her son in the ball-room, and he, knowing the danger of further recognition, would not go on shore again. He it was who wrote that letter of warning! I am the 'fiend' whose eye of 'lawless passion' had fallen on the form of the lovely Belle of Baltimore. So—ho! And now, even now this upstart whom I have made almost equal to myself, plans to leave my service—to quit those with whom he has been linked so long in deeds of lawlessness! We'll see—we'll see! Leave me he may, but it will be to find bottom in deep-sea soundings!"

Again he listened. He heard a voice soft and low and musical:

"Oh, it will be hard, very hard, dear Edward, to part with you—but the thought of your return will lessen the pain. I have never known such happiness as I have found in your love."

"It will be short-lived!" muttered the pirate, and now he boldly advanced to the front of the bower, where his eyes, fierce with anger, rested on his lieutenant and the fairest face and form that he had seen for years.

"Ho! You have a lovely excuse, sir, for neglecting your duty on board ship!" he cried sternly, as Marvel rose to his feet and partly concealed the shrinking form of the beautiful girl from the lawless gaze of the unprincipled captain. "I give you just a half-hour to report on board, and then we sail for Baltimore—for Baltimore, you understand, where your lovely sister Sadie awaits my coming!"

"Villain! You have been playing the eaves-dropper—the part of a base and cowardly spy!" cried Marvel, so wild with anger that he cared not what he said.

"The presence of a lady protects you, Lieutenant Marvel, from instant punishment. Report on board in half an hour, or an armed guard will be sent for you. I give you time for a tender and a last farewell!"

Spirifort uttered these words with a bitter sternness that boded ill for the future of his subordinate.

"A last farewell? What does he mean?" cried Melisse Duprét, clinging to her lover, pale and trembling.

"To frighten me—but it is a failure!" said Marvel, trying to be calm, though his anger was terribly excited. "I know him too well. He dares not try to injure me. But one thing I ask of you! Write instantly, when your mail-packet arrives, to my dear mother and sister, inclosing a few lines which I will pencil now. It is to warn them of his threat. I have long been absent from my mother; the lines I give you to forward will partly explain my prolonged absence, and as soon as I can break loose from the service I am in, which shall be at the next port we enter, I will rejoin them, and then, my sweet angel, I will come for you!"

"Why not resign and break from him here and now?" she asked.

"It would be impossible. Here he can use force that I could not resist. But in a port where there is law and authority, I can defy his power!"

"Alas, dear love—until I see or hear from you again, I shall be in an agony of suspense!"

"I beseech you not to fear for my safety, precious Melisse. My whole life has been one continued peril; I am used to it and shall overcome all danger and trouble for your sake! Do as I ask you and fear not!"

Saying this, he tore a leaf from a blank-book in his pocket and told his mother and sister that he had been forced into a most disagreeable service from which he intended shortly to free himself; also, that when he had done so he would go to them without fail. He also spoke of his new-found love whom he hoped in the near future to present to them as his cherished bride.

This written and handed to her, he spoke a few tender and cheering words and then escorted her into the house, where he said adieu to Monsieur and Père Duprét, her father and uncle, simply saying his captain had decided to leave the harbor in a very short time.

Then he went to the boat which waited for him, for he knew that Spirifort had not trifled in his threat.

CHAPTER XVII.

A NOVEL DEVICE.

WHEN once aroused, Spirifort was a very demon to think and prompt to act on his thoughts. When he threatened that he would sail for Baltimore, he meant it, but how he could go there without deadly peril to himself, vessel and crew, had to be an afterthought.

And, quick as his discovery of Marvel's relationship to Sadie Ridgewood, came up a plan in his active mind.

And he saw close at hand the material and the means to carry out that plan.

Before he went on board his schooner, he went to the only ship-yard, if such it might be called, in the settlement.

It was owned by an enterprising Scotchman, who, having learned his trade in the old country, made a fair living here by building small boats and repairing fishing-sloops and schooners which got damaged as they often did at sea.

He had plenty of timber, a few good and reliable hands, and was skillful and industrious.

To him Spirifort went, and by his first question aroused his native greed and interest.

"Would you like to make a thousand pounds sterling in gold by a few days of sharp work and the use of a few timbers and plank?" asked the captain of the supposed Mexican privateer.

"Would a duck swim if open water was before it? What would ye have done? If the work is honest, I'm the man to earn a thousand pounds if I can!"

"I wish you to disguise my schooner. There was a large Spanish fleet after me when I came up the coast, and it will be hard to work my way back to Mexico without I can put my craft in some new shape."

"Gude captain—that would be easy. Take one mast out and make a sloop of her, or cross yards and turn her into a brig."

"Neither would disguise that long sharp hull. My plan is to build a false bow and stern on her hull. The first bluff and full, the other flat and square, then raise her bulwarks, so the hull will look like a lumbering drogher on the coast. Then I can stay her masts forward and so alter her looks that my own crew would not know her if they were not on board while the work was being done!"

"The plan is gude. I dinna see but it could be done, and done in less than a week were I to put all my hands to the work. An' it's a slack time just now. A thousand pounds ye said for the job?"

"Yes—in gold, paid down when the work is finished!"

"I'm your man, gude captain—I'm your man and ready for the work as soon as ye'll haul in!"

"But, listen to me. This work of disguise must not be done where everybody can see it, or the news would soon get abroad and defeat the very object I wish to gain. Is there not some sly nook, river or inlet twenty or thirty miles away from the settlement where we can slip in and do this work unknown to anybody but ourselves?"

"There's a bay about forty miles south, inland of an island, that would suit, for there's no settlement nearer than this!"

"Could you not select your timbers and planks and put them on board my craft quietly to-night and then sail with your men with me to the spot? When the work is over I can land you here again in the night and your gold will be well earned!"

"That's true, captain. I'll see my men, look over my timber, and be ready this night if it is your will!"

"It is! And, as a token, I hand you a purse of fifty golden sovereigns to bind our bargain!"

McDevitt, the builder, carefully weighed the purse which Spirifort handed him, and then counted the pieces of gold.

"It is all right, captain, and I dinna doubt we'll make a good job of it. If you'll let your schooner slip down to the end of my wharf after night sets in I'll have all ready, and we'll be off and at the other bay by the time another daylight's up!"

"All right!" was Spirifort's reply, "we'll be at the wharf after night has fairly set in and all seems quiet in the hamlet!"

"So far, my plan works well!" muttered the pirate chief, as he left the boat-yard and turned toward the landing-place where his gig waited for his return.

He saw, without pretending to notice it, that Marvel was walking down slowly from the house on the hill, his head bent forward as if the weight of sad thoughts hung heavily upon him.

Purposely Spirifort slackened his own pace so that Marvel should be first on board. When he saw him go over the schooner's side he entered his own boat and bade the crew "give way."

In a few minutes he was on board. Marvel, pale, but silent, stood on the quarter-deck, as if waiting the next move of his fiendish chief.

Ignoring the presence of his first officer in his orders, Spirifort turned to the second officer and said, loud enough to be heard by all hands:

"Fire one gun and hoist the recall signal at the fore-truck. Some of the men are yet on shore. And heave up to a short mooring. See all clear for making sail. Have all the boats but one hoisted in. And, mark you, sir, no one has leave to go on shore again except the crew of the boat that brings off the absent men!"

The officer glanced at Marvel, as he replied, "Ay, ay, sir!" He knew that the lieutenant and captain were at loggerheads or the former would have received the orders he had listened to.

Marvel said nothing. His face was turned toward the shore. His heart, his every thought was with the lovely girl whom he had just left in tears in the house on the hill.

Spirifort seemed to divine this and would not even give him the comfort of looking shoreward.

"Traitor!" he cried sternly, "to your room, under arrest. Do not dare to leave the cabin without my permission, or I shall put you in irons!"

"Captain Spirifort, I am not a traitor, and you know it. No more faithful officer ever served under you. If you can dispense with my services, discharge me and let me go on shore at once."

"Let you go on shore to betray us? I am not such a fool. You have been on shore too long already. But if you specially desire it, I will send and have your lady-love brought off to keep you company."

"No—no, sir! Anything but that!" groaned Marvel, almost crushed at the thought.

"Then to your room, and be thankful I simply place you under arrest. If I did you justice—yours would be a short shrift."

Marvel made no reply. He went below and soon heard the rapid tread of the crew as they roused in the slack of the cable on deck.

"He means to sail at once," he muttered.

"But he will not dare, fiend though he is, to attempt to enter Baltimore. Capture and death would be the result. Better that than wrong to those I love. Life has but one ending. But there are wrongs which live forever! Fool—fool that I was to come on board here at his bidding. Once in yonder forest I could have remained concealed until he was gone—but he might have avenged himself on her who is dearer far than life to me! It is better as it is. I will soon escape from here. Then a life of evil I will no longer live. Well, Jumbo—what do you want?"

The black steward approached him—a sorrowful look on his face, for the lieutenant had ever treated him kindly.

"You is in trouble, I'm afeard, Mars' Marbel," said the servant, in a low tone. "Is dere any-ting Jumbo can do for you, sah?"

"No, Jumbo—no. The captain and I had some words and he has put me under arrest. He will need me when heavy weather or hard knocks are at hand, and only be too glad to restore me to duty. You know his hot temper."

"I ought to, Mars' Marbel. If I hadn't a skull thicker dan a bull's, I'd have been dead afore now wid de knocks he has gibben me. If dere is anyting I can de for you, Mars Marbel, you know dat Jumbo 'll do it."

"Yes, Jumbo. You are a good lad. Do not worry about me. I'll come out all right in time."

"I hope so, sah. Dar—de cap'n's callin' me. He's awful short to-day, cross as a she b'ar wid cubs a-teasin' her."

Not until after night set in did Marvel hear any further preparation for leaving the harbor. But about ten o'clock—or just after four bells had struck, and he had turned into the berth in his state-room, he heard the crew at work. The anchor was run up to the bows and the vessel seemed to be moving down-stream.

He was glad she was going out in the night. The eyes of Melisse would not be strained to get a parting glance at the form she loved so well.

When the schooner touched the wharf at the boat-yard, Marvel felt the jar. He could not account for this landing, and rising he dressed himself to be ready to learn what was going on. He did not know but Spirifort meant to raid the little hamlet, poor as it was, though nothing could be gained by such violence.

Soon he heard the tramp of many feet and the crash of planks and timbers as they were carried inboard from the yard. He went to the companionway of the cabin and listened. He heard strange voices—new to his ears—giving orders.

What could it all mean? It was beyond his comprehension! The bringing on board of lumber as if they were taking in cargo.

The broad Scotch dialect of the boat-builder as he gave orders to lay timbers here and plank here, and the stern command of Spirifort from time to time to hurry up the work, confused him. What new deviltry was the pirate chief concocting?

After a time the tramp of hurrying feet and the crash of timber ceased, and the lieutenant heard the sharp stern voice of Spirifort ordering sails hoisted, fasts cast off, and soon knew by sound and motion that the schooner was under canvas and standing out to sea.

At the same time Jumbo came down and began to set a cold lunch in the cabin, by order of the captain.

"What is going on above, Jumbo? Are they making a lumber-drogher of the schooner?" asked the officer.

"It looks dat way, Mars' Marbel. De deck am all clobbered with timbers an' planks, and dere's a lot o' ship-carpenters on deck dat's goin' wid us, I heard de cap'n say. Him de boss carpenter is comin' down to eat jess as soon as de course is shaped outside, I hear him say. And he tole me put on plenty ob grub an' grog, he was as hungry as a shark an' dry as a leaky water-butt!"

Marvel could only wait now in patience to learn what mischief Spirifort had in view.

Soon the captain was heard at the companionway, and Marvel retired to his state-room as the best place for gaining the knowledge he wanted.

Spirifort and the Scotch carpenter were soon at table, and while they ate and drank the plans for putting on a false bow and stern were fully discussed.

And now, to his horror, Marvel saw that Spirifort really meant to carry out his threat to visit Baltimore. With the schooner transformed so as to completely resemble a slow and clumsy merchantman, and a cargo picked up from some out-of-the-way port, the main part of the crew hidden away—what was to prevent his doing so successfully?

In agony Marvel sat and pondered over the future. How could he escape from the infernal craft in time to warn and save his loved ones from the fiend who plotted a ruin worse than death ten thousand, thousand times?

Suddenly the cry of "Sail ho—close aboard!" was heard on deck, and Marvel's heart leaped high, a second later, to hear a sharp, stern voice shout through a trumpet:

"Schooner ahoy! What vessel is that?" It sounded like the hail from a man-of-war, and Spirifort rushed on deck.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SALLY ANN AND A CARGO.

"El Goleta Mexicana Capricio!" shouted Spirifort in Spanish, as he saw the white sails of a little cutter sloop which had luffed up close to windward.

"It's the mail cutter, that runs to the inlet twice a month—nothing worth stopping for," said McDevitt, recognizing the vessel which they were already passing swiftly.

"Thank Heaven!" murmured Marvel to himself. "She stays but a single day in port, and on her return she will carry a warning from my sweet Melisse to those whom I yet love, in spite of our long estrangement! They will be on their guard, if indeed they do not leave the city with no trace that he could follow. Now I can feel easier."

When Spirifort and the head carpenter returned to the cabin to finish their lunch, Marvel had again returned to his berth where he, for a

time, listened to their talk and then dropped asleep.

When he woke in the morning the vessel had reached the bay or cove where the work of transformation was to be carried out. It was a lonely spot—a mere little cove, backed by high cliffs and in the rear of a forest-covered island which cut off the view seaward and broke the ocean swell, leaving the little basin as smooth as an inland pool. Here, shored up as before, with spars, the carpenters could work without hindrance, except when the tide was at its highest; and Marvel, though not allowed on deck, knew well what was going on by the sounds of saws and hammers which filled his ears.

Four days this work was going on, the planks getting a coat of paint as fast as they were in place, to assimilate the false with the real part of the hull.

Meantime, the second officer, with a good part of the crew, slackened up all the backstays and after-shrouds in the rigging, and set taut on the stays leading forward, so that the masts were soon brought over from the pretty rake they had held until they were perpendicular—or if anything stayed forward so as to give them the stiff and clumsy look of a merchantman.

When the carpenters were nearly done, Spirifort caused the painters to paint two great ungainly stripes of light yellow around the entire length of the hull, bow and stern, making her look as coarse and common as any craft could be made to appear.

When all was done to his satisfaction, Spirifort paid off the carpenter and his men, all that he had agreed to pay and even added a gratuity, when, as the weather was fine, and the water smooth, they agreed to return home in a large boat which he could spare, and thus save the schooner from again visiting the inlet.

And now, before going to sea, to satisfy his own malice and to let Marvel see the wonderful change in the looks of the vessel, which would defy recognition with those who had seen her in her beauty of spars, canvas and hull, Spirifort called the lieutenant out and took him on shore where he could scan the vessel below and aloft as she lay swinging to a single anchor at short range.

In the bluff bows—the square, low stern, the wretched paint, with her straight masts up and down, and an old patched suit of sails on her, the schooner resembled an old, worthless drogher just fit to carry cargo on the coast where a port could be reached easily if the weather looked ugly.

"What do you think of the Diablocito now?" asked Spirifort, keenly watching the face of his subordinate.

"For once she wears what her commander cannot—an honest look!" was the quiet reply.

"For all her honesty of look she yet carries her teeth!" said Spirifort, alluding to her guns, which were yet visible on deck.

"Ay, and she'll need them bad enough with her sailing qualities all destroyed!" was the rejoinder.

"She'll need no guns when she enters Baltimore as a peaceful trader and waits for the market prices to rise till my other plans are carried out!"

"May I ask, Captain Spirifort, what those 'other plans' are?"

"You may ask, but I, not having yet fully decided upon them, it will not be likely you can get an answer. Suffice it for you that when the Diablocito leaves that port she will carry out more treasure than she takes in, and what I most covet there will be on board when I seek Southern waters once more."

Marvel made no answer. He hoped to be restored to duty when the vessel sailed now, as it would make his intended escape in the future more feasible, and he did not want to anger Spirifort any more, if he could avoid it.

He knew that the second officer, though a good seaman, was no navigator, and that Spirifort had always depended upon him as such.

His conjectures were right, for the next day, before weighing anchor to go to sea, Spirifort said, in as pleasant a tone as he could assume:

"You had best return to duty, Mr. Marvel. I was in an ill-humor when I put you under arrest!"

Marvel merely bowed; he would not trust himself with an answer. He knew it was but a hollow truce at best, but he deemed it better to avail himself of it as far as he could.

So, when they got under way, he was at his station, and when the sun neared its meridian as they plunged along through the bulky seas, he got up his sextant, took the latitude and entered it on the log.

The orders were to run down the coast until they could sight some lumber port, where a cargo of lumber or staves could be taken on board to hide the guns and carry out the character the captain meant to assume.

He had had a name painted on the broad, awkward stern of the craft:

"THE SALLY ANN, OF GREENOCK."

Hailing from abroad, with forged foreign papers, he thought he could do better in American ports than he could under a home hail and colors

—so far as keeping up his disguise went. He had caused the false bow and stern to be so put on that he could very soon have them displaced, and when the spars were once more in their old place, could make his craft as swift and rakish as she had been before.

The crew not having much work to do now on the rough, lumbering old craft, took things easy, lived high and enjoyed themselves, knowing well from the past that this lazy kind of life would not last long, but that Spirifort would soon be in some mad enterprise again. They had sailed too long with him to expect an extended season of quiet.

After leaving the fishing-banks, where fleets of sloops and schooners were engaged in taking cod and halibut, too busy to mind any business but their own, or to notice any craft that crossed their hawse or wake, sails were seen few and far between. Too far northward for commercial routes they were in no danger of meeting any craft whose officers would give them a second look.

CHAPTER XIX.

A BRAVE GIRL'S DECISION.

HALF her night had been passed in tears by sweet Melisse Duprét. It seemed to her as if her parting with Edward Marvel would be eternal. When she rose early and glanced from the window out upon the glittering waters of the bay, as they danced merrily in the early sunlight, she saw the spot vacant where the Mexican man-of-war had been anchored. The vessel was nowhere in sight; she had made sail and gone to sea amid the darkness of night.

The poor girl sobbed bitterly, for she felt from the dark, threatening look on that face, as well as the harsh words he uttered, that Spirifort was a deadly enemy to the man she loved, and she feared that the life so dear to her was in peril, dark and imminent.

While she was dressing she glanced again out on the bay and saw the white-winged mail-packet running in to the pier it always occupied.

Hurrying down to the salon, where her father and uncle waited her presence at breakfast, Melisse sadly alarmed them by the deathly pallor of her cheeks, her red and swollen eyes.

She was too good and pure to conceal her feelings or use any subterfuge. She told them both of what had occurred in the afternoon of the previous day, when the captain of the Mexican schooner had surprised his lieutenant in her company in the garden, and of the quarrel between them which resulted in his being ordered on board immediately, on pain of arrest if he hesitated to obey.

Then she told of the threat which alarmed her lover in regard to the safety of his mother and sister in Baltimore, and the letter of warning she had promised to write to them.

"But," said she, "instead of writing to them, I will go myself to warn them. A letter might be lost or miscarry, while I—I would surely reach them and be there to receive my Edward when he gets free from his present entanglement, as he will at the earliest possible moment!"

"But, child, the distance, the danger of travel!" cried her uncle, the priest.

"Your God and the holy saints will watch over me!" she replied. "I do not fear danger when duty is before me!"

"If you go, my dear daughter, I shall go also. You are too young, and have been too tenderly reared, to go out into the wicked world alone!" said the father.

"I know, my brother," he added, "that you will be lonesome without us, but we will return, Heaven prospering us, right speedily!"

"My duties never permit me to be lonesome!" answered the priest, sadly. "But I shall miss your kind words and the bright face of my dear niece. But go, if you think it wise and right, and my prayers will go with you. I, too, was pleased with this manly stranger, and if you can avert danger from those he loves, no word of mine shall keep you back!"

"Then, dear father, it is settled; we will go in the mail packet when she sails."

"As you will, child, so be it. A look into the brighter outer world will do you no harm, and when you have seen both sides of life there, you may feel more contented in our peaceful home here!"

And that was all. Within the hour fair Melisse began her preparations for the journey. And her heart grew lighter as she did so, because, she said to herself:

"I shall see his dear ones, and soon, oh, I pray it may be very soon, clasp him in my true and loving embrace, meet him to part never, never more!"

It was a busy day in the house upon the hill, for Monsieur Duprét had his own wardrobe to look over, a trunk to pack and money to take from the strong vault where his old family silver and such funds as he and his brother owned were kept.

He knew not how long he would have to be absent, neither how much money he might need, but, advised by his brother, he resolved to carry enough in gold and paper to support him and his dear child handsomely while gone, should it be

a year or more, instead of only a month as both hoped.

For but six weeks, or eight at best, would elapse ere navigation in that extreme latitude would be closed for the winter. Then a long and dreary lapse of six or seven months would ensue, when all intercourse with the Southern world would be closed and no possible means of correspondence open, except by Indian couriers, who *could*, and sometimes did, on snow-shoes, traverse the icy wastes to the settlements far below.

The captain of the swift little mail packet was surprised, but not disagreeably, when Monsieur Duprét and his lovely daughter came on board to take passage with him to Quebec. For, long as he had sailed to and from the inlet, they had never before put foot on his deck, though he had made many purchases and executed many commissions for them in his many voyages. He had always been a welcome guest at the house, and though a Protestant and an Englishman, he was a great favorite with the good priest, who had many commissions to intrust him with.

In truth, nearly all the supplies for the hamlet were brought by the packet, and its master, good John Odell, had a very profitable trade with the Indians, taking their furs and bringing back powder, lead, fish-hooks, blankets and other things which they needed.

Through the influence of the good father they were fast becoming civilized, and that, too, without learning to use "fire-water"—one of the curses of civilization too often introduced to their race.

The sun was just setting behind the forest trees in a bank of dark clouds when Monsieur Duprét and his daughter were welcomed on board the packet by Captain Odell.

He always gave the English termination to her name when he spoke to Miss Duprét, calling her Miss Melissa, instead of *Mélie*, as pronounced by her father.

"You're right welcome aboard the Osprey, mounseer, and you, too, Miss Melissa," he said, as they stepped on board, their baggage following, borne on the shoulders of two stout seamen, whom the captain had sent after it.

"The sun sets rather ugly, but the wind will be off-shore if it is fresh!" he said, as he ushered them down into his snug little cabin. "We can hug the land and keep in smooth water, so you'll both have a good night's rest!"

"I hope it will not storm, for I am a great coward on the water!" confessed *Mélie*.

"It may blow some, but the sloop is stanch and weatherly—have no fear. The steward will have supper before we strike the swell outside!" was the old captain's assurance as he went on deck.

"Up with the canvas fore and aft!" was his next order.

The sails were up in a few seconds, for they were light and the tackle for hoisting handy. Then came the order:

"Cast off!" and, loosened from the pier, the little packet sped away on her return voyage.

The steward, a blithe Frenchman, set the table as soon as the vessel started, and aided by the Canadian cook, had a most appetizing meal—venison, fish and wild ducks, with delicious coffee, before the passengers.

Having given the helmsman the course, Captain Odell left the deck in charge of the mate, and came down to sup with his guests.

"Did you meet any strange vessel in your voyage up?" asked Miss Duprét, after the captain was seated.

"Yes, Miss Melissa—we met a very large, swift-going schooner running down the coast. I hailed her, and got some answer in an outlandish tongue I couldn't understand, and then she was out of sight, for it was in the night before I made the light at the mouth of the inlet."

"It was the privateer; they answered your hail in Spanish," said Miss Duprét.

"Spanish or Dutch would be all the same to me, ma'am—just like Greek. I can get over some French, because I hear so much of that—the cook and steward are eternally jabbering in it. What was a privateer doing away up here out of the way of ships and people?"

"They came here to rest and get fish and venison, and to refit their schooner, they said."

"Where did she hail from?"

"She was from Mexico, so they stated."

"Ah, yes; Spain and Mexico are at war, I remember. Well, she was a clipper to go. I hove my craft up in the wind's eye to speak her—but it was a swash and she was gone!"

Supper was all over, and *Mélie*, with her father, was on deck, when the packet rounded the point on which the light-house stood that marked the entrance to the inlet. The western sky, usually crowned with a rosy hue so early in the morning, was dark now—overlaid with black, swift-flying clouds.

The good old captain—no better seaman ever trod a deck—called out to the watch to take a single reef in the mainsail and ordered the bonnet taken off the jib. This done the sheets were trimmed for the wind abeam, and keeping well in with the land, the sloop went down the coast at ten knots to the hour easily.

As they were in smooth water this speed was

delightful to all hands, for it promised a short return-trip, as well as a safe one.

Mélie, having her dear father with her, was happy, for she was used to the water, and felt as if she was hastening to those who were dear to her betrothed lover, and would also be likely very soon to meet him.

Two hours later, close to the land as they were, they had to close-reef all the sails, and soon after only the mainsail, reefed down, was kept on the craft, for the wind had risen to a gale—such a tempest as would have been dangerous to the stanch little craft had she been a few miles further out.

Mélie and her father lingered long on deck—not that they feared danger, for the captain told them that he could enter safe harbors every few leagues if he desired, but it seemed so strange to hear the wild surges leaving and dashing in the offing, and yet to bowl along so fast in smooth water under such scanty canvas.

Only men who know every fathom of the coast line would have dared to run within a cable's length of the shore, as Captain Odell did, but he was on a bold coast, and had no cause to fear reefs or rocks or shoals until a long way further south.

At midnight the watch was changed, but the captain still remained on deck, though his passengers had retired to their berths. He was a man to keep double watch when he deemed it was necessary, and he would not trust to others the duty he believed to be his own.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DOOM OF THE COASTER.

LUMBERING along on a southerly course, the *Diablocito* in her new rig had nearly reached the latitude of Halifax, and was not more than sixty or seventy miles east of the coast, when, just as day dawned, her captain found his craft nearly alongside a huge brig with a hull full as blunt and ugly as his own.

Lieutenant Marvel had the watch, and he hailed her just as *Spirifort* came on deck.

"Brig ahoy!" he cried, "where from and where bound?"

"The brig *Tomboy*, from Halifax, bound to the West Indies for a market—cargo staves and puncheons!" was the answer. "What schooner is that?"

"The *Sally Ann*, from Greenock, in ballast, bound in for a cargo!" replied Marvel, directed by *Spirifort*. "If you have late papers, heave to a bit, so we can get the news, and we'll give you a keg of 'mountain dew' that never saw a gauger's stamp."

"All right! Round in head braces! Hard a-lee!" came the prompt answer.

As the brig came up in the wind, *Spirifort* said in a low tone:

"Lay him aboard! All hands on deck! This fellow has the very cargo we want. It is easy to handle, good for a Southern market, and will hide our guns till we want to use them!"

If ever men were suddenly astonished, it was the officers and crew of the brig—only about a dozen all told—when they saw the schooner thrown directly alongside, to windward, while her crew of near one hundred men came pouring up from below and instantly sprung on the brig's deck.

"What does *this* mean?" shouted the captain of the brig, angrily, as *Spirifort* called to his men to lash the two crafts together.

"It means that I want a *part* of your cargo!" answered the chief, coolly.

"You can have it *all*, if you'll *pay* for it!" said the Halifax man, turning pale when he saw that the men who boarded him were all armed.

"I'll pay you in my own way!" was the sneering answer. "Men, seize and bind every man and officer belonging to the brig and pitch them here in the lee gangway. Then carry this deck-load aboard our own craft, fast as you can. Mr. Marvel, see to the stowage on our deck, while the second mate looks out below!"

"This is an *outrage*!" yelled the captain of the brig.

"I admit it; but don't grumble yet! We have only commenced our work. I'll look over your papers and see what else you have on board that I want!" announced *Spirifort*, starting to enter the cabin.

"Great Heaven! Are you pirates?"

"That is what imprudent people call us."

"Mercy! Spare our lives! If such a cargo as *this* is any good to you, take it, and then let us go!"

"It is a capital cargo for disguise, light and easy to get rid of. But the other thing isn't so sensible! If we let you off you'd scud back to Halifax and start every man-o'-war on the coast after us. Our motto is, '*Dead men tell no tales*!' A secret buried at the bottom of the sea is sure to be well-kept."

The captain and crew of the brig had been seized and bound the instant *Spirifort* gave the order; so they were powerless in every sense. Not a sail was in sight on the ocean. And in the stern, almost savage, faces around them they saw no pity.

They were silent—all but their captain, and it was the silence of despair.

"We will solemnly swear not to divulge how we lost our cargo—not to say one word that will

endanger you!" cried the captain. "Spare our lives and you will not regret it. I can even put you in the way of finding ten thousand dollars in specie."

"*Fool!* We have treasure enough in yonder craft to sink every soul of you a thousand fathoms deep without our feeling the loss. We are ballasted with gold and silver. Think over your prayers—for you'll soon be past saying them!"

The captain groaned, but made no further answer.

Meantime, while the pirate crew were busy transferring cargo to their own craft, *Spirifort* went into the cabin of the brig to get her papers and anything else he saw worth having. He knew by what his prisoner had said that there must be a small amount of specie hidden somewhere on board, and perchance, little as it was, he thought of adding it to the pirate treasury.

Rapidly the decks of the transmogrified *Diablocito* began to assume the appearance of a lumber-drogher.

Staves, puncheons and boards were piled high above her guns, and enough taken in below to make the appearance of a full hold, though in reality the quarters of the crew were not shortened to their discomfort.

All this work occupied even that large crew nearly half that day, and in all this time though several sails of vessels were sighted a long distance off, none came near enough to show their hulls.

When the cargo was in, *Spirifort* turned to the unhappy crew of the stripped brig.

"What is your choice, men, to die by water or fire?" he asked, in a matter-of-fact way. "If you choose water, you will take one plunge and all is over. If you say fire—with no chance of escape you will roast, for I shall fire this brig fore and aft, above and below, and lay by her till the last spar and plank is gone."

"Do your accursed work at *once*, and may the curse of widows and fatherless children follow you down to eternal perdition!" shrieked the captain, who saw no hope in the sneering, fiendish face of the pirate leader—none in the crew, except perhaps in one who dared not intercede.

"Bring up a piece of kentledge* from the run—

Twenty of the pirates rushed below—some forward, others into the cabin.

While the men who went into the hold forward found the heavy iron they went to seek, those who went into the run under the cabin found something better.

With a shout of joy they returned, bringing four canvas-bags of silver dollars, which they laid before the captain.

"So ho! *This* is your ten thousand-dollar specie offer?" said *Spirifort* to the unhappy captive captain. "You see we have found it without your assistance!"

"Curse you, yes! But it will do you no good. It may help to sink you deeper than ever we will sink!"

"We'll see! Boys—get the plank ready—ballast them down and overboard with every man. Save the braggart captain to the last!"

The instant *Spirifort* gave the order, ready hands began to work.

While some of the sailors moved their lips in silent prayer, others begged for life; still others filled the air with bitter curses.

But soon all was over. Man after man, with a piece of heavy iron ballast bound to his body, was placed on a plank which extended out over the bulwarks of the vessel. The inner end was raised and the helpless victim was dumped over into the ocean. A sullen plunge and he was gone forever—death and burial but a single act.

Last of all—no one went to his fate more bravely than the merchant captain. His last words were a bitter and scathing prayer for God to send down his heaviest curses on the heads of his inhuman murderers.

The instant the last of the brig's crew was out of sight *Spirifort*, with fiendish glee, shouted:

"All ready now to cast off the schooner and make sail!"

Seeing his order attended to, with his own hand he set the brig on fire both forward and aft, starting the fires below where they would spread swiftly.

Then, springing to his own deck, he gave the order to cast off, and soon the schooner was again standing on a southern course, leaving the brig a mass of flame which, before they were out of sight, had finished her destruction.

Aided by a man who was a skillful penman, though before the mast, *Spirifort* now had the papers of the brig so altered as to suit the schooner in name and rig, so that he could enter any port he chose on the coast, and show a regular clearance and manifest. With his guns hidden and his decks heaped with staves, puncheons, and other lumber, no ordinary official would suspect him to be other than what he professed, especially as he intended, if overhauled, to class a large part of his crew as passengers going South to get work and change of climate.

That night, after the crew were all settled down to the new state of things, and had got a

* *Kentledge*—iron ballast, cast-iron pigs.

little used to a deck-load, the captain approached Marvel, who had just been relieved on watch by the second officer, and said:

"Mr. Marvel—I'd like to see you in the cabin. It is time that you and I had a full and complete understanding!"

"All right, sir; I am ready!" responded Marvel, coolly, leading the way toward the cabin.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT SPIRIFORT DARES TO DO.

"MARVEL, we have been friends too long to become enemies *now*!" was Spirifort's first remark after they reached the cabin. "And you are aware, too, that I do not long allow an enemy of mine to stand in my way."

"I understand what your last remark implies, Captain Spirifort, and feel assured that, were I not *necessary* to you as a skilled navigator, I would not be long-lived under any circumstances."

"I don't think my past treatment of you justifies that remark, Mr. Marvel. But I called you down to try and smooth over matters, and to get back on the same footing we were on before you got me angry the other day."

"How did I get you angry? We had had no words, that I am aware of, until you broke in upon me when I was talking with one of the best of human beings!"

"Yes, and in that conversation, which I accidentally overheard, you were revealing secrets before unknown to me—in fact, telling her that you had a mother and sister in Baltimore, and revealing to me, by your words, that you was the author of a letter which gave to me the character of a devil rather than a man—the letter of warning to Mrs. Ridgewood and her daughter Sadie. Was not that discovery enough to anger me—hot-tempered as I naturally am?"

"Perhaps so! But now, answer me! Have you ever spared a woman who fell into your power—no matter how pure or lovely, how good and innocent?"

"I cannot say that I have. But must a man always be a fiend? Is there not a time when he can reform—when, influenced by a love such as he has never known before in all his wild life, he can become changed—plan to quit a career of crime, become virtuous, and, fairly and honorably wooing a worthy maiden, as fairly and as honorably wedding her?"

Spirifort had replied in a tone so earnest, and with a look that seemed to second every word he uttered, that he might have deceived any one who did not thoroughly understand his depraved and heartless nature. But he spoke to one who had known him long and had never seen but one good trait—perhaps *manly* is a better word than *good* there—and that was *bravery* in his nature. Spirifort was recklessly brave, and never flinched, no matter how a battle was going. This alone drew his followers to him, and they both admired and feared him.

Marvel smiled while he shook his head in doubt.

"Captain!" he said, "you have often told me you were born in a pirate's cabin on the old Tortuga, and never knew or cared to know a better life. Am I to believe what you have always said, rather than what you now utter? I have read that a death-bed repentance was of no avail, and this sudden change, after so many years, looks *dubious*, to use the mildest expression."

"Well, well—I will hold no argument with you on that point now. I want a plain answer to two plain questions. Is not the Madame Ridgewood, whom I met in Baltimore, your mother?"

"Yes!" replied Marvel, coldly.

"Then of course her lovely daughter is your sister!"

"YES!" answered Marvel, growing more stern.

"If you love them, as I should judge you do, from the way you spoke of them to that fair-faced girl on the coast of Labrador, would you not rather your sister should be the wife of an honest man, who could place every comfort and luxury of life before her, than to live as now without a protector in the world beyond a mother in delicate health?"

"I do not know what right you have to thus question me."

"I assume the right. I love your sister, and for her sake I purpose to become an *honest* man—to leave this life forever and with the wealth I own individually in our common treasury to purchase an estate and perhaps a title in Italy or Spain, where I can live a *new* life!"

"The picture is very pretty—but you seem to assume that you can have my sister's love and hand for the asking. Do you think my sister or mother would touch your hand if they knew that it had been reddened by the blood of more than a thousand victims?"

"When they know their son and brother is a pirate, but wishes to reform, they will not be very apt to hesitate. And I flatter myself that your mother was *well* pleased with me, and the daughter surely evinced no dislike!"

"Because they believed you a brave and noble

officer in an honorable service. It is no use, Captain Spirifort—you had better give up that chase and stick to your old and natural life!"

"And give you a discharge, or let you desert and go back and wed that Lily of Labrador and live the life I covet while it is denied to me? You must think I am losing my wits. Either I marry your sister, or you will remain a pirate, and the fair girl in Labrador will pine in vain for another sight of her lover!"

This was spoken in a tone too serious and earnest for Marvel to doubt that Spirifort did not mean all he said. He paused before replying. He wanted time to think. He would dissimulate.

"I will think it all over," he said to Spirifort. "It would help me, perhaps, if I knew your present plans."

"To a certain extent you shall know them! I intend to test my disguise by running the schooner boldly into some Atlantic port, Boston or New York, ostensibly to lay in some more provisions for a West India voyage. I will lay off at anchor and see how our papers work, if they are inspected at all. While there I will run down in person to Baltimore to see how the land lays, and if the ladies are still there. Of course I shall go in disguise, and what I learn on that visit will determine my future course. Alone I could do no wrong, even if I wished to, without exposing myself to ruin and all my plans to failure!"

Marvel drew a long breath. He was perplexed. He knew not what to say or do. If he *openly* opposed the projects of Spirifort he knew the latter would either put him out of the way, or so confine him that his opposition would not avail.

"Your plans seem feasible!" he said. "Of course you would not object to my going to Baltimore with you—disguised so no one would recognize me that had ever before seen me."

"Most decidedly I should object, for there is no one else on board whom I could safely leave in command!"

"As you will."

Marvel spoke as if he was resigned to the course the chief meant to take; but from that instant he resolved to escape from the vessel on the very first opportunity, and to devote his life to the protection of those whom he had almost forgotten in the wild life he had so long been leading.

And here—a brief narrative of how he came to lead it is opportune.

Choosing a mariner's life, even in his boyhood, he went to sea with an old friend of his parents, while both were living. Before he had finished his third voyage he had become so proficient in navigation and seamanship that he came home a second mate, appointed in place of a man who was not fit for the duty.

He went to sea on his fourth voyage in a clipper ship bound to New Orleans from Baltimore, with a rich general cargo. That ship was spoken once, south of Abaco on the Bahama Banks, but never again was heard from. It was supposed she had gone down with all on board.

She did go down—but she was scuttled and sunk by the red-plumed pirate after her crew had made a desperate resistance. Brave as the bravest, young Ridgewood had fought the pirates until stretched senseless on the deck.

Such courage in a mere boy pleased Spirifort, and when the others were slain and left to sink with their dismantled ship, the pirate had the youth carried into his own cabin, where he tenderly nursed him back to life.

It was long before he was able to stand on a deck again, and when he came back to a knowledge of things about him, the pirate sloop which Spirifort then commanded lay in a lovely little harbor in the Island of Tortuga, where cocoanut and lofty royal palms spread their broad leaves over a sward of soft grass and flowers.

There, on the island, in elegant quarters, with fair women to serve and wait upon him, every luxury around him, the youth was gradually brought back to strength and health.

Then Spirifort told him of the utter destruction of the ship in which he had sailed, with all on board, but him—not a vestige left, so that henceforth he would be supposed lost with her, like the rest.

Gradually he worked upon the boy's mind, by exhibitions of immense wealth, until the lad consented to sail with him. For the other choice was death, for the pirates neither saved nor kept prisoners.

And, at the same time, the boy who had purposely given his name as Edward Marvel—leaving off the name of Ridgewood, made up his mind to escape from such a dreadful life the moment it was made possible.

Learning soon that young Marvel was a splendid navigator, as well as a good seaman, Spirifort made him his first officer, much to the anger of the man whom he superseded—a *pirate* in every sense. The latter threatened vengeance, but he did not live long enough to injure his rival, for Spirifort heard his bitter words and put a bullet through his head. A mutineer never met any mercy at his hands.

Gradually Marvel had grown into the life thus forced upon him, feeling as if he was dead to those he had left behind him, and knowing that by the law of nations his life was forfeit from the

association in which he would be found should he ever be captured.

"We are off Montauk Point; the northern entrance to Long Island Sound is open under our lee!" said Marvel to Spirifort, when they had been out from Labrador about two weeks.

Both were in the cabin, and a chart of the coast was spread out before them.

"If you want to go into New York quietly, the way coasters from the North usually go, we should enter the Sound here and run down to the city inland."

"Good! Can you run by chart without a pilot? Pilots have sharp eyes and would endanger our safety!"

"I can run by chart. The Sound is wide and deep and easily navigated. Only when we near the city does the channel narrow."

"Then heave away; we will enter the Sound."

Marvel went on deck, had sheets trimmed and the course altered so as to run in. Then he returned to the cabin, leaving Spirifort on deck. His purpose was to examine the chart more carefully to note the position and bearing of light-houses and beacons and the location of shoals.

He had still another purpose. In the run under that cabin was the magazine which held the powder for the great guns as well as all the fixed ammunition for small-arms on board the vessel. In this run, in bags, vast amounts of treasure in silver and gold coin were stored—the common property of officers and crew—or so understood. In the magazine was a box in which lay loose great numbers of diamond rings, bracelets, brooches, etc., the richest and choicest part of the treasure. To this magazine both Marvel and Spirifort held duplicate keys.

And now, in all haste, Marvel went down to the magazine and filled a large money-belt with the largest and choicest of these gems. Hurrying up to his state-room after closing the magazine, he adjusted this belt about his waist under his clothing.

He had but just finished this work and returned to an apparent inspection of the chart, when Spirifort called out to him from the companionway:

"Come on deck QUICKLY. Two American men-of-war are just ahead, in the channel!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TRICK WELL PLAYED.

WITH three bounds Marvel was on deck. A wild hope entered his breast. He had not one association of tender feeling for any on board that hated craft—doubly, trebly *hated* since a wish for a nobler, better life had been born with his love for sweet Melisse Dupré. If the pirate could be captured, and he *convinced* the captors that he was not a willing pirate—had been *forced*, as he truly *had* been, to become one of the blood-stained band, he would soon be a free man, free to join her whom he loved, and free to lead thereafter a pure and honest life. On his person he had a fortune, safely concealed from any ordinary search.

Reaching the deck, he saw on their weather bow two square-rigged vessels—one a brig, the other a ship—evidently by her one tier of guns a sloop-of-war.

To snatch the glass from its becket on the binnacle and draw the focus of sight on the last-named vessel was the work of a second.

And his cheek paled as he recognized the sloop-of-war to be the same which had chased them when they left Baltimore.

"Keep out of sight, if you value *your* safety and *ours*, Captain Spirifort!" he cried. "The scar on your face is a mark of recognition no one will forget that has seen it before!"

"Curse it, man—what do you mean?"

"That every officer in *that* ship would know you at a glance, though you are not in Spanish uniform now and we all look coarse and slouchy in our dress! That ship is the sloop-of-war whose officers extended so many courtesies to us in Baltimore!"

"Thunder!"

"Lightning too, if she should heave us to and send an officer on board who would recognize us!"

"That must not be! Steer so as to be hailed—showing no wish to avoid it. I will go below. Only half a dozen of our commonest-looking men shall stay on deck. Have the papers in your pocket, so he'll not have to go into the cabin if an officer is sent on board. You do not look as you did in Baltimore—you have let your whiskers grow and your hair also."

Spirifort spoke calmly, though he seemed to feel the situation and its peril.

Marvel at once held the schooner up on a course which would run her between the two vessels, which, now heading directly out to sea, must pass almost within a pistol-shot of her.

The deck of the apparent lubberly lumber drogher was almost deserted—only the scanty crew usual to a coaster being in sight. Not a sign of arms—not a look to show her *real* character.

As they drew near, the sloop-of-war luffed up in the wind and laid her head yards aback, a sign that she wanted to speak the incoming craft.

Marvel, trembling, not from fear, but from an

uncertainty how to act, headed so as to reach just to windward of the sloop-of-war where he intended to luff up also in easy hail and so close that a broadside from the sloop would sink the schooner in a single minute.

Just at that instant Spirifort put his head up the cabin hatch and said:

"Do your best, Marvel, to satisfy them without being boarded. You know I have sworn never to be captured, and a match is lit below and the magazine open. If the worst comes—we'll all go to perdition together!"

Marvel was "struck all aback," to use a nautical phrase, and a plan he had formed was dismissed. He knew, from Spirifort's look and words, that the schooner would be blown to atoms the instant her capture seemed inevitable.

So he replied, in a quiet tone:

"Keep out of sight. I'm luffing up where I can answer questions without giving them the trouble to send a boat on board! Have no fear; I'll throw dust in their eyes!"

A minute later the lumber-laden schooner was up in the wind and almost motionless within easy hail of the sloop-of-war.

"Schooner ahoy! Where from, whither bound, and your name?" came sharp and clear from an officer whom Marvel recognized as the first lieutenant of the man-of-war.

"Out o' Halifax, twenty days, runnin' for York for provisions and water—had a gale and stove some of our water-casks. Bound to the West Indies with staves and puncheons for the sugar trade. We're the Sally Ann, from Greenock!" drawled Marvel—awkwardly.

"So I see—now your stern shows the name. Have you seen a rakish brigantine, painted black, sharp and low in the water, on your voyage?"

"No, cap'n—haven't seen nothin' but some fishin'-craft on the banks since we've been out. We've been in a fog or a gale all the time!"

"Very well! Fill away! We'll not detain you!"

"Thankee, ap'n! What mought your vessel be?—I see she flies the Stars and Stripes!"

"The sloop-of-war Ontario, Captain Porter, bound on a cruise. Report us when you reach New York!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

The sloop-of-war now squared away and resumed her course, and Marvel drew sheets aft on the schooner and headed as near down the Sound as the wind would let him.

As soon as both vessels were well apart, seeing that the brig had held her way, Marvel stepped down into the cabin to tell Spirifort that the danger was over.

He found the pirate chief calmly smoking near the hatch which covered the magazine, and saw, too, that the hatch was open, and a lighted fuse burning within reach of his hand.

"It is all over—we are safe for this time at least!" announced Marvel.

"Yes! I heard every word. You did well, Mr. Marvel—very well! I will not forget it hereafter. It would have been a close call had they sent a boat on board, but you see I was ready for the worst!"

And Spirifort pointed to the open magazine where tons of powder lay exposed to an igniting spark.

Then, laying down his cigar, he extinguished the fuse, and closing the magazine put on the sheltering hatch again.

Marvel did not evince any surprise. More than once he had heard the captain swear never to be taken alive, and that when capture was certain the schooner should go *down* or *up*, no matter which, with all on board and the treasure as well.

Returning to the deck, as night was now drawing on, he set his lookouts, put up the customary lights and shaped his compass course by charts.

The manner in which he had handled the schooner, and answered the man-of-war in the hour of peril, made Marvel more than ever popular with the crew. Little did they dream how near he had been to betraying them, for his first plan was to run as close as he could to one of the men-of-war, throw himself into the sea, and swimming to her, announce himself as *escaping* from a pirate, leaving them to no uncertain fate since they could not reach or man a gun for defense and must surrender or be sunk.

Only the certainty that Spirifort would give him no chance for the act saved them. Spirifort was a dead rifle-shot, and ever kept his favorite weapon loaded where he could use it at a second's notice.

Marvel had thought of this only when he saw the pale, stern face of the chief in the companion-way, just before the hail came from the sloop-of-war. And he knew that one who could hit a floating bottle tossing in the sea a hundred yards away, nine times out of ten, would not miss the size of his head at half the distance.

So he waited for another and a better chance. He did not mean that Spirifort should reach Baltimore before he did, for he put no faith in his professions of pure love and a desire to leave the life he had led so long.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SPIRIFORT'S LOSS AND GAIN.

AFTER the two men-of-war were well out of range, so that no critical eye could see the change

even through a glass from their decks, Spirifort and a few more of the pirate crew came up and helped to trim sails and work the "Sally Ann," for the wind had drawn ahead and they had to make occasional tacks as they proceeded southward.

Even with all sail set, and a chunky head sea to butt against, the schooner made slow headway, and the night of another day was on them when they sighted the narrow pass known as Hurl Gate—or on their chart Hell Gate. It was marked "very dangerous," and risky as it was, Spirifort knew he must have a pilot to pass it in the night, as he wanted to.

So, with Marvel again acting as captain, the hail of a pilot-boat was answered and a pilot came on board.

He was in a light skiff, which was fastened astern as soon as he got on board, so he could leave after the schooner was safely through "The Gate."

This pleased Spirifort, for the man would be on board too short a time to make any dangerous discoveries. In truth, he was not half an hour in performing his duty, and left the schooner as soon as she passed the eastern end of Blackwell's Island, telling the supposed captain, Marvel, of two anchorages—one off the Battery, the other near "The Hook," in the East river.

The latter was too close to the United States Navy Yard, Spirifort said; so the North river anchorage was chosen, and an hour or more before midnight they were at anchor in the stream off Castle Garden.

Weary with work, for they had been two days beating to windward in the lumpy sea on the Sound, they were only too glad to turn in for rest, leaving only one man as an anchor watch on deck. And he soon fell asleep, giving a class who spend their nights afloat and wide awake for mischief, a chance to get in a lesson on "river piracy" to men used to less stealthy work on the open sea.

Spirifort lay in his berth, his state-room door open, an hour or so after they came to an anchor—wide awake, thinking of his proposed visit to Baltimore, planning out a disguise and a course of action. The hanging lamp in the cabin, turned partially down, cast a softened light over the room.

Suddenly the chief heard a sound as of muffled footsteps coming down the companion-ladder, and just as he sprung to his feet, and snatched a pair of pistols from under his pillow, there was a sound of a heavy fall and a growling voice muttered a curse on "slippery rubbers."

As Spirifort leaped out on the cabin floor, a pistol in each hand, he was confronted by the man who had just come down the cabin ladder so rapidly, who rose from the floor with a pistol in his right hand, as five other men, all masked like himself in black, with holes for their gleaming eyes, sprung noiselessly down the ladder and ranged themselves by the side of the leading man.

"You seem to be ready for visitors, mate, but as we are six to one, you might as well lower them barkers of yours and give in!" cried the leader of the masked men, his pistol cocked and leveled.

Spirifort laughed.

On the right Marvel opened his state-room door holding a cocked pistol in each of his hands; on the left the second mate of the schooner afforded a similar picture; while out from the pantry, forward, stumbled black Jumbo with a huge blunderbuss in his hands.

"Covered, by the big wolf of Ramapo—covered in front and rear!" cried the head river pirate in dismay. "I say, boss, we'll cry quits if you will, and take to our boat which lays alongside!"

"Not yet! I never let guests go away without refreshments!" said Spirifort, grimly. "Though you came uninvited, I shall not neglect the rules of hospitality. Advance, one by one, lay your weapons on that table and unmask! You will be safe—men in the same line of business should never quarrel!"

"In the same line? What are you?"

"Pirates, like yourselves, only we do a bigger trade at sea, while you work the rivers!"

"Boss—you're fooling us! You're loaded down with lumber!"

"I'll show you a different sight in my hold. Do as I bid you, or that blunderbuss will throw a handful of musket balls through your ranks!"

"It am all ready, Mars' Fire Feather!" cried Jumbo, his terrible weapon at full cock and presented.

"Hold on there! Don't fire! We give in. If you are what you say, we're safe in it!"

And as he spoke the leader of the masked men advanced and laid his weapons and his mask on the table. Each of his men followed his example.

They were not any handsomer unmasked than before. Every man in visage looked the full-fledged ruffian. The leader, a giant in size, had a scar that was almost a counterpart of the mark on the face of Spirifort.

The latter laughed, long and loud.

"Brother!" he said, "you look as if you had seen service in rough latitudes!"

"Maybe I have. I've not been at play all my life. But that's no reason why I should be laughed at! You're not much of a *beauty*, yourself!"

"That is true, my brother. Sit down, gentlemen. Jumbo, put away that blunderbuss and get a cold lunch out and some wine and brandy! Marvel, you and the mate can keep guard on deck and see that we are not disturbed by any more visitors. If you find the anchor watch asleep, see who he is, but do not disturb him. I'll settle with him at another time!"

Marvel and the second officer went on deck as directed.

And, to the astonishment of the river pirates, the negro steward brought out cold meats, fine bread, butter, wines and liquor, and they were asked to sit down to a veritable feast.

"You're a cussed queer 'un!" declared the captain of the river gang. "How many men have you aboard this old drogher, to make you feel so easy?"

"Over a hundred! One note from the whistle you see hanging here will fill this cabin with armed men!"

"By the great wolf of Ramapo, you're well heeled! And you're the coolest cuss that ever got the drop on me! Boys—we've met our master! Here's to his health!"

And the river pirate drained a bumper of raw brandy as quietly as if it had been water. His example was followed by his men.

"And now, cap'n—what are you going to do with us?" he asked.

"No harm, you can depend. If I meant that, you'd have all been overboard before now!" said Spirifort. "Are you well acquainted on this coast?"

"I ought to be! My father was a coast pilot and I worked with him nigh twenty years, till he got into *quod* for smuggling. Then I went to the *bad* and turned river pirate. You ask if I know the coast? There isn't a bay, river or harbor, big or little, from Maine to Mexico that I don't know!"

"Good! I may give you a job. If I do, you and your men will get better pay from me than you ever had before!"

"All right, boss! We risk a good deal in our line here, for the fly cops are sharp, and only once in a coon's age do we make a real *good* haul!"

"Captain, will you step here a moment?"

The second mate called from the head of the cabin hatch.

"What is the matter?" demanded Spirifort.

"Anything going wrong up there?"

"I don't know, sir! Mr. Marvel stepped into the boat alongside, as he said, to see if there were any more men there. The next I saw he was sculling off in the darkness toward the shore!"

"Hell and fury! He has deserted! The next thing we know he'll alarm the authorities and we're caught like rats in a trap!"

"Yes, there are three or four men-of-war and two revenue cutters lying at anchor within a mile of us!" announced the river pirate. "And the cuss has run off with our boat!"

"You'll not need the boat, just now. I'll give you and four men a boat-load of silver dollars, the pure coin of Mexico, if you take me safely down the coast to where I direct! We must get out of here in a hurry. If that man has turned traitor he will leave nothing undone to destroy me! On deck there—how is the tide?"

"Strong ebb, sir."

"And the wind?"

"Coming out fresh from the northwest, sir."

"Good! Be ready to slip the cable and up sail at once! Call all the men up you need. It is too dark for men to be seen a rod. Show no lights! Jumbo, shut off the cabin windows there!"

These orders given, Spirifort turned to the head river pirate.

"Your name?" he asked.

"I'm known as Scar-faced Jim," was the answer.

"Then, Jim, will you serve me—you and your men, for a few days, for BIG PAY?"

"I will! My men are free to act as they wish—they can speak for themselves."

"Where Jim goes, we go. We'll stick to him!" was the reply.

"All right! Take another drink, and then for the deck. We'll get out of here, and by the time we are out at sea, we'll be fit to fight or run as the case may call! I've got the men, the tools and the craft, as you'll see when we are on blue water!"

The pirates of the river pledged fealty to those of the sea in another bumper of brandy; then all hurried on deck.

In less than five minutes the schooner was scudding off with a strong ebb tide astern and all the canvas she could set to a stiff breeze just coming out from the northwest. She headed down the bay, and Scar-faced Jim was the pilot.

And as she went men were busy under the direction of the carpenter prying off the false bow and bulwarks and stern which impeded her speed so much.

Others were engaged in tossing the deck load of lumber overboard, and cleaning away all im-

pediments which prevented a free working of the guns.

Still others, under Spirifort's own eyes, were staying back the masts into their old rake, and getting up square yards, so as to crowd on more canvas if she could stand it when outside.

All the men—the river pirates included—worked as if they knew their lives depended on their energies.

And when, just as day was dawning, the schooner, headed off south by east, with the Highlands of Navesink on her weather quarter, sped along at a ten-knot rate, no one would have known her as the same vessel that had beat down Long Island Sound so sluggishly the day before.

Her false sheathing was all stripped off. Her false bow, stern and bulwarks gone also, and now the bow, sharp hull and raking masts, as well as the cannon ready for instant use, told her true character.

Her crew, once more in shape for work, were full of glee, for they had got tired of peace and quiet.

Scar-faced Jim had gladly accepted, in addition to his position as pilot, the office of second in command under Spirifort, rendered vacant by the desertion of Marvel. His comrades, lured by the prospect of vast riches held out to them, joined the pirate crew willingly.

Scar-faced Jim—now known as *Lieutenant James*, by order of Spirifort—was a good navigator, as well as a fine seaman, so the pirates would have gained by the exchange but for the new danger on shore—the man being there who knew their Southern haunts, and could recognize them in every rig they could assume.

Fairly at sea before it was light enough to look up through the Narrows to see if any men-of-war were in chase, Spirifort scudded off, keeping a lookout astern as well as ahead.

After a topsail had been got up forward, and a squaresail set, the pilot's course given and taken, Spirifort went down with "*Lieutenant James*" into the cabin to consult upon their future course.

Knowing that he could find safety nowhere if Marvel worked against him, for the latter could send the bounds of war upon all his usual trails, he knew he must destroy him or be destroyed.

So he told the old river pirate all about Marvel, and the likelihood that the latter would hasten to Baltimore to join his mother and sister, even if he did not at once betray him.

"Then why not go or send some party to Baltimore who knows him, and have the cuss put out of the way? Then if you want the girl, have her brought off, and with her scud away to new waters, where we can rake in plunder hand over hand!"

"The idea suits me," said Spirifort. "But the schooner is already known up the bay and in Baltimore. We could never anchor there again in safety, day or night."

"Who wants you to?" demanded Lieutenant James. "It will be easy to capture a small oyster or fishing-smack. Send her crew down to Davy Jones's locker, and then go in the craft or send a smart chap with a few trusty men to do the work."

"While this is being done, I know of a snug hiding-place a little way down the coast where we could lay for weeks, unseen—a lagoon in the turpentine pines of North Car'liny where I went more than once to lay out a gale when dad and me were conatin'. He hid there from the revenue-cutters when two of 'em were close after him. He was a-smugglin' cigars and tobacco then, from Cuba, and was makin' a big thing of it, when he got logged through the treachery of a mate that he had a row with."

"The plan is good—the best in the world!" cried Spirifort, when he thought it over a minute or more. "Can you show me the hiding-place on our chart?"

"No; it would be a poor hiding-place if it was down on any chart. It has been overlooked because, in the first place, it is so small, and next—it don't open out in sight. But I can find it, night or day, and put you on landmarks that will lead you right into it. You run in by Hatteras inlet first, and that is all plain sailing. The coast isn't settled yet and scarce ever a craft goes in there, but some old coaster in a stress of weather that can't reach nowhere else."

"Lieutenant, you are a treasure! I see my way clear enough. Before we are off the Chesapeake, which will be to-morrow early, if this holds, we will both look the chart over carefully and I can get instructions how to find you. I will go in to Baltimore in the craft we capture and take men enough to do my work. I will leave you in command of this craft. Our interests hereafter are one and the same!"

"Kee-rect, cap'n, if you say so. I'll send one of my pals with you, who is not only a good pilot in the bay, but was with me and dad of old, and knows the hidin'-place. The thing 'll work like a launch on greased ways when the tide is up! There's always a lot of sloops and schooners comin' out with oysters from the James river and up the bay at this time o' year. A good many, too, are fast and roomy, and one of 'em will be just the thing to run in with. Ten or a dozen men can handle him easy, and no one would sus-

pect anything wrong in an oysterman. We'll do the whole thing up in three or four days and then—then burrah for work somewhere out o' the reach o' buzzards!"

Thus—with a plan settled and washed down with a bumper of brandy, to which Lieutenant James was much affected, the captain let him go on deck.

For himself, he now had a little matter of inspection on hand. He did not believe that Marvel had gone on shore—deserted him, with empty pockets. He had, as we know, a key to the treasure-box in the magazine.

And to examine this, now that he had time, was the first work of Spirifort. Often—hundreds of times had he opened the box of jewels and exulted over the precious contents. He knew they were worth millions of dollars. He had been many years adding to the store.

First he found that a bag of gold-coin was missing. Then—when he examined the large jewel-box, a cry of rage and vexation broke from his lips. He could see that diamonds, pearls and rubies to an immense value had been taken.

"The ungrateful wretch!" he gasped. "He has carried off a fortune! But I will have his life and all those jewels back or lose my own life in the work!"

Closing the box of which now he held the only key on board, he shut up the magazine and returned to the cabin. Hitherto, Marvel, whom he had so implicitly trusted, alone had shared a knowledge of the contents of that box. Now, he meant to keep the knowledge to himself. Thus only might he at some time be able to appropriate the whole to his own use—while he satisfied his ignorant and murderous crew with the tons of plate and coin that lay in boxes and bags in the cabin run and after hold.

For, like all other criminals, he looked forward to a time when he could leave his perilous life and on some far-off shore live like a king in all the luxury and ease that boundless wealth could bring!

Going on deck, Spirifort learned from the officer of the deck that several lofty, square-rigged ships were standing out past Sandy Hook and heading south.

"That curse has set the men-of-war or cutters after us!" muttered Spirifort. "But we're in trim now and can outrun any craft afloat, let alone such old tubs as they have in their navy!"

"The men-o'-war don't amount to much, without you're under their guns!" said Lieutenant James, his scarred face all aglow with pride over his new position. "But, they've got some cutters in the revenue line that are keen as bloodhounds; but I reckon this little devil, as you call her, can outtail 'em all!"

"Stake your life—all our lives on it and we'll win!" was the cool reply. "We're hardly in our old trim yet, but you'll see us leave 'em every hour till not a sail can be seen astern. But we are in our old pattern now, and we must look out ahead as well as aft, lest we tumble on an enemy when we least expect it!"

He now looked again carefully at every stay, and spar, and brace, had new sails set up, and, bending one at a time, soon had better canvas to hold the stiff nor'wester that drove his craft along.

And, as he had boasted, in a little while the sails astern grew less and less in size, and long before night they were alone on the ocean—not a sail in sight.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MARVEL'S WORK.

WHEN Marvel went on deck, he had no thought of escape from the schooner. But, looking at the thousands of street lamps and lighted windows on shore—that shone scarce two cables' lengths away—and seeing the empty boat alongside, the thought of his loved ones in Baltimore, and the dear one in the far North, leaped like fire into his heart.

The chance the boat gave him seemed so opportune—he knew he could scull her out of sight in less than a minute and land in thirty or forty seconds more, before a boat could be got out to pursue him.

Instantaneous as his thought came the action. He was armed. He had a belt of coin and another of precious gems about his waist, a full purse of American gold in his pocket, and he had been before in New York in his boyhood and still remembered somewhat the lay of the streets.

He knew well that, once he was on shore, he was safe from the open pursuit of Spirifort and his crew, for they had too much risk to run to make their appearance under the eyes of a vigilant police.

The instant he entered the boat, he cut the rope which held it to the schooner's side, unshipped the rudder and placed an oar in the sculling-hole over the stern.

Heading directly for the nearest wharf, he sent the boat swiftly ahead, and as it touched the pier he leaped upon it, pushing the boat adrift with his feet.

A moment he waited to hear if any alarm was raised on board the schooner; then hearing no noise, he passed on quietly up the deserted pier

crossed one street and went up a narrow lane which led directly into Broadway.

He paused only a moment here to consider what next to do. To destroy Spirifort would remove danger from those he loved and also from himself, for, while that fiend lived, he would seek revenge. If his vessel was captured with all the proofs of her character visible under her disguise, the pirate's fate was sealed. And he would soon be beyond the power of doing an injury to any one.

Marvel did not take long to consider what to do. He hurried to a cheap hotel, which had an all-night restaurant connected with it. Here he called for a light supper and a mug of ale, and while eating talked with the night-clerk.

Through him he learned that four men-of-war—a United States frigate, a sloop-of-war, a large brig, and a foretopsail schooner—lay at anchor near by in the North river. Also that two revenue cutters, both foretopsail schooners, and very fast, were near the very anchorage of the "*Sally Ann*," or *Diablocito*.

Calling for a room and paying for his lodging in advance, and ordering up a bottle of wine and pen, ink and paper, which he also paid for, Marvel made a very favorable impression on the clerk, and also on the sleepy waiter at his table, who got a silver dollar for an eye-opener.

Once in his room, Marvel wrote a letter directed to the captain of the American frigate, telling him that the writer had just escaped from the notorious pirate *Diablocito*, commanded by one Spirifort, known as *Fire Feather*, the King of the Caribbean waters. In his letter he described her present anchorage, her disguise and false name, the heavy armament concealed under her deck-load and the number of armed and desperate men under her decks.

He stated that, when his absence was discovered, she would most likely change her anchorage and perhaps try to get to sea.

Making six copies of this letter, he hurried down to the clerk and asked where a trusty boatman could be found who would do an important errand for him.

A boatman who slept in the house was aroused, and taking him outside, Marvel handed him the six letters, and giving him ten dollars in gold, received his promise to deliver a letter to each vessel—or to the officer in charge of the deck. When he came back from the performance of this errand, the boatman was to receive ten dollars more.

As each letter was marked outside—"IMPORTANT—FOR INSTANT ACTION"—he felt sure that a part if not all the vessels would at once proceed to overhaul and examine the craft described, whether at anchor or under way.

This done, he sat and talked with the night clerk over a cup or two of strong coffee for the next two hours.

At the end of that time the boatman came back to receive his promised extra pay.

"Thankee, sir!" he said, as he pocketed the gold coin. "Whatever the news was you sent to them men-o'-war and cutters, it stirred 'em up mighty. Before I got back to where I keep my boat, two or three of 'em was under sail, and a whole fleet o' boats from the frigate went tearin' down the harbor!"

"The news was important," said Marvel, "and the effect shows that you have earned your money. It is so near morning I think I'll take a walk and come back for a sleep when I have had breakfast!"

With this excuse he left the hotel. While there he had seen a notice of the hours when he could leave for Baltimore by railroad, and he meant to leave as soon as he could learn for a certainty what had become of the *Diablocito*. He hardly believed she could be captured without a desperate struggle on the part of Spirifort and his crew, and he almost wished she might be blown to atoms, thus ending the existence of all on board and relieving him from all future peril.

Anxiously he crossed over to West street on the North river and peered out on the water where the schooner had been at anchor. She was not there! But, near the very pier where he had landed, several boats, fully manned, seemed to be on the watch for something, and he heard an officer say:

"There must be something in it. The captain of a vessel at anchor out there, with an anchor watch on deck, says just such a vessel as that described in the letter got under way in a few seconds, making no noise, slipping her cable with a splash and running up sail faster than he ever saw canvas go up before. She went right down the bay. We'll hear from her soon with three of our vessels and the two cutters in chase! She can't get away!"

"Heaven grant she may not, but the arch fiend below has ever seemed to help that Spirifort, and I shall never be easy until I know he is dead!"

Thus soliloquized Marvel as day began to show in the far eastern horizon. The men-of-war, with the cutters in advance, were seen under all the canvas they could carry far down the bay, and an officer in a boat sent up from the sloop-of-war with a message to the senior captain in his frigate, told the officers in boats near the pier that the bay was covered below with staves,

puncheons and planks thrown from the vessel they were in chase of, and there was no doubt she was a pirate, as the letter of warning had stated.

Marvel was now in a fearful state of suspense. The question was if Spirifort *did* escape, would he not, in his anger and desperation, endeavor to strike a blow in Baltimore which would be worse than death to him if it succeeded? And how, without revealing his own late connection with the accursed pirate, could he raise force from the authorities to save and protect those whom he loved—oh, how dearly, now that he hoped for a better and brighter life than he had ever lived before.

For near half the day he wandered aimlessly, restlessly along the wharves near the Battery, waiting, hoping to get some news from below.

Seeing a pilot-boat coming up, he hired a Whitehall row-boat and went on board to see if he could gather anything there.

He was told that an armed schooner, with a long, low hull, very sharp and rakish, had gone to sea, heading south, about daylight—carrying a cloud of canvas.

About two hours later a fleet of men-of-war and cutters went out, carrying all their kites. That was all the pilot knew—but they spoke of being bothered on their way up by a large quantity of drift. Some heavy, splintered planks had been picked up as they came along.

Marvel *knew* them at a glance. But he kept that to himself, and as soon as he got on shore he started for the point where he could take the fastest train for Baltimore.

On his way he bought the first edition of an afternoon paper, and saw a notice of the escape of the supposed pirate. In the notice a copy of the letter sent to the captain of the frigate was printed, and appended were these words:

"Captain Dallas will liberally reward the writer of that letter if he will report on board the frigate and give his aid toward capturing the notorious pirate, who so narrowly escaped capture lately in Baltimore, where she masqueraded under the Spanish flag. The writer is assured of his personal safety if he so reports."

For an instant Marvel wavered in his plans. He could, if he *would*, name ever haunt of the pirate, every harbor where he had sought concealment, or gone in for rest, safety and refreshment. He *could* put the men-of-war on routes which the pirate would be sure to take, he thought. But if he did this, his services would be required as a pilot, and if danger, near and dark, did threaten those who were in Baltimore, he would not be there to help them.

Only for an instant did he falter. Checking all other desires he hurried to the station and took the train for Baltimore.

He was faint, weary and sleepy, and after swallowing a sandwich and a glass of water from the tank in the car, he leaned back in his seat and slept.

He woke once only when the conductor inspected his through ticket, and then fell off into a slumber which lasted until they reached the old-fashioned ferry-boat at Havre de Grace.

Here he got a cup of coffee while crossing the river and got thoroughly woke up. It was near daylight, for those were days of slow travel by rail.

When the train entered Baltimore, clad as he was in coarse seaman's dress, he had no fear of recognition, but to be safe and sure, he entered a clothing store, purchased a suit that would have suited a genteel farmer, or cattle-buyer, bought a valise to put it in, entered a hotel, registered as Mr. Smith, ordered a room and breakfast.

When he came down to breakfast in clean linen and new clothes, he looked well, as a mirror in front of his table told him. He breakfasted on Baltimore luxuries; then, anxious to look his best, after a bath he went to a barber-shop, had his hair trimmed and got shaved.

Then, so nervous that he hardly dared trust himself for the visit, he wrote his real name on a card, and, with tremulous haste, started for the well-known mansion in Calvert street, intending to send his card in by the servant who opened the door, rather than to startle his mother by a sudden appearance.

It was full ten o'clock when he reached the front of the house.

"Great Heaven! THEY here!" he gasped, as he looked through the parlor window.

CHAPTER XXV.

A LIVING WITNESS AND A HOT SEA TRAIL.

By noon of the second day out the schooner was off the capes of Virginia, pretty well out in the edge of the Gulf Stream, lying in wait for some fast-looking oyster sloop or schooner, with which, when captured, Spirifort could carry out the fiendish plans suggested by his first lieutenant, Scar-faced Jim.

The pirate chief had selected twelve of his bravest and most reliable men, besides the pilot furnished by the river pirate, who were, with him, to board and capture the first vessel they overhauled of a suitable character. The hapless crew were to be thrown overboard, and no man

was to be left who could tell the tale of how the rest perished.

They had several hours to wait before they saw a craft which seemed to have plenty of speed and good weatherly qualities.

A half-dozen slow and common-looking craft went and came within three or four miles, but were not molested. But at last, just before night set in, a smart-looking schooner under main and foresail, jib and flying-jib, with gaff topsail furling on the mainmast-head, came skinning out with "a bone in her teeth," as sailors often say when they see a wall of foam part under the bows of a vessel going fast.

"She's our meat! Look how her masts rake. She is a regular clipper to go—bet your bottom dollar on that!" cried Lieutenant James, as he saw her standing toward them.

"Get up a United States revenue flag and hoist it before it's too dark for it to be seen!" cried Spirifort to the second mate.

In a couple of minutes the flag was at the main gaff of the Diablocito, and as the clipper schooner came near, Spirifort told James to hail and make her heave to.

"Schooner ahoy! Luff up and heave to under our stern!" shouted James. "We wish to send a boat on board!"

"Ay, ay, sir! What vessel is that?" came back from the little clipper.

"United States revenue-cutter Marion, Captain Faunce in charge! What schooner is that, what cargo, and where bound?"

"The oyster-schooner Flirt, from James river, for New York, sir, with a cargo!"

"All right. We want some oysters; will have a boat alongside in a few minutes, and then you can lay your course!"

It was now dark, so dark that the little crew of the oysterman could not see how large a number of men were coming in the boat.

There were Spirifort, his pilot and twelve men besides, with the crew of the boat which was to row them to the oysterman and return to the schooner after the capture.

The vessels were not a pistol-shot apart when the pirate boat touched the oysterman's deck. The crew of the latter, officers and all, were but six men, and before they could ask a question, or scarcely shriek for mercy, they were stricken down and tossed overboard.

The work—fell and dreadful as it was, did not occupy three minutes of time. Within that period Spirifort shouted:

"All right; the craft is ours. Dead men tell no tales!"

Then, while the schooner's boat returned to the Diablocito's side, to be hoisted in, sheets were started on the captured oysterman, and she headed away to the southward with the schooner.

"Dead men tell no tales." But—God is all-powerful and his providences are wonderful! The captain of the oysterman, stricken down by a stunning blow from the butt of Spirifort's now empty pistol, was pitched into the water with the rest of his men. Yet—while all but him went gurgling down to death, he revived in the cold dash of waters and rose to the surface as the two vessels swept away in the darkness, to the southward.

Swimming desperately for life, he watched their disappearing lights, while he prayed to Heaven for rescue. He had a dear wife and a precious boy waiting his return in New York—would they never, never see him more? Must he perish as he felt his men had done?

Oh, it was terrible! Out there alone on that dark heaving sea—thirty miles from land—ah, what did he feel as he struggled wildly for life?

A drifting plank! He threw his tired arms over it and rested. If he could but hold fast till the dawn of another day he might see a vessel—might, in the infinite mercy of his Creator, be saved—saved for those whom he loved so well and to whom he was almost all in all of love and life's support and joy.

The plank was old and water-soaked—it had been so long in the water that barnacles had grown upon it, and it barely kept his head and shoulders out of water as he rested with his arm over it.

The short, tumbling waves washed over him continually, and but for the thought of those so dear to him in his little home in the great Empire city, he would have given up, let go and died. But he was a brave man, a Christian, and strong of heart. He had prayed all his life, but now he prayed as he had never done before, in agony and fear, to be spared for the sake of the dear wife and little one.

All that long, that dreary night, he clung to his frail support—chilled to the marrow, but resolute to the last. When the morning star rose he saw it, and when the rays of the rising sun began to redden the gray, misty clouds in the east, he looked longingly over the wide waste of waters to see if a speck of white indicated a sail.

And oh, how his heart leaped up thankfully in praise to Him who had heard his prayers! He saw six sails in sight, all within a few miles of each other, and one, a great ship, seemed to head directly for him.

Nearer and nearer she came, and he hardly breathed lest he should so weaken that his shout

for help should not be heard, when she swept by, for her course would be a musket-shot away almost.

Nearer and nearer, until he saw the pennant aloft, the guns and lookout in the cross-trees, and knew she was a man-of-war.

Now she was almost abreast of him, and he had not been seen. Madly, wildly he shouted, and tried to wave his feeble arms in the air.

On—on she went, and was almost beyond him in her course when an officer, with a glass in his hand, stood up in the waist of the ship and scanned the ocean.

The poor captain, too exhausted now to even wave a hand, was seen, and sharp orders given through the speaking trumpet reached his ears.

Swiftly the great sloop-of-war came up in the wind, her head-sails flapping in the breeze until they were thrown flat aback, while the after-yards were braced sharp-up.

Even before the ship's sharp headway was stopped, a boat was lowered from the davits, with the crew all in, ready to pull toward the helpless man the instant she touched water.

Oh, what music in those springing oars and the shout of the officer:

"Hold fast, my man, we'll soon be there!"

And soon, very soon, strong arms grasped the poor captain, and he was lifted unconscious into the boat. He had fainted from excess of joy as much as from weakness.

Quickly he was in the cabin of the grand old ship—the Concord, Captain Ridgely, and his story told. Then signals flew aloft from the mast-head, notifying the other vessels in sight—men-of-war.

"Pirate heard from—she captured a schooner at twilight, last night, and threw the crew overboard. We have picked up one survivor. Pirate and her capture bore away south, a little westerly, toward Hatteras. Keep up the chase!"

While everything was done to restore the almost exhausted oysterman, the sloop-of-war bore away again, set studding-sails below and aloft, and kept up the chase. Her captain hoped the pirate might get careless and shorten sail when he supposed he was beyond pursuit.

Little did he dream that the master fiend of the band, Fire Feather himself, disguised as an honest oysterman, with half of his murderous party hidden below, was speeding up the Chesapeake in the captured schooner, while the Diablocito herself, guided by a skillful hand, was swiftly nearing a hiding-place unknown on the charts and safe from his approach—for, with twenty-two feet draught the man-of-war could not cross over the bar over which, with nine feet depth the sea-rover could safely pass.

The other vessels, answering the signals of the Concord, now crowded on all the canvas they could set, and spreading right and left so as to barely keep in sighting distance, swept off to the south.

Captain Minturn, the rescued oysterman, had so completely described the pirate that Captain Ridgely knew she could not be a great many leagues ahead.

It was thought she had taken the oyster-schooner as a tender, for her captain said she was the fastest boat of her class in the great oyster-fleet which plies between Virginia and the Northern ports.

He represented that she was boarded by at least twenty men when the supposed revenue-cutter ordered him to heave to. The deck of the pirate seemed to be full of men, and all her guns appeared to be run out and ready for action.

"She shall have all the fight she wants if we once get her under fire!" said the gallant Ridgely, a noble man of a noble stock, as he made the rescued seaman at home in his own cabin.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL.

WHEN Edward Marvel Ridgewood—the name on the card in his hand, and his real full name it was—uttered the cry of astonishment which closed the twenty-fourth chapter of this story, he saw, seated with his mother and sister, near the parlor window, two people who had been in his thoughts night and day almost all the time since he left far-off Labrador.

These two were no other than Monsieur Duprét and his daughter, Melisse.

Delayed by strong gales, and toward the close of the voyage by adverse winds, having to seek harbor several times, the little packet had been a long time in reaching her destination. Thus it occurred that Monsieur Duprét and his fair daughter, with the letter of warning from the son and brother, had been but one day in the Ridgewood Mansion when the young man himself reached the city.

Received with open arms, not only on account of the letter they bore, but for their own evident worth and true gentility, they felt and appreciated the warmth of their welcome.

Mrs. Ridgewood, finding that they had not discovered the real character of the vessel in which her son had been, as she believed, unwillingly held, did not try to undeceive them.

Between Sadie and Melisse a magnetic sympathy seemed to spring up the moment they met—a mutual love—a sisterhood of nature hard to describe, but beautiful to look upon.

After a moment of tremulous hesitation,

young Ridgewood, as we henceforth shall know him, not having been seen by those whom he had looked upon, advanced to the door and sounded the knocker.

A colored servant quickly appeared, and handing him the card, the young man said:

"Take that to your mistress and say I am here and will be most happy to wait upon her if she is disengaged!"

The servant left the door ajar and carried the card in. A scream of joy broke on young Ridgewood's ears and then a sound of hurrying feet.

Stepping into the hall to avoid the notice of passers-by, he was in a second clasped in the successive embraces of mother, sister and sweet-heart, if the term is applicable.

At first, words were hardly spoken, emotion choking utterance. But soon, in the parlor, where he met and grasped the hand of good Monsieur Duprét, Marvel had a chance for brief explanation.

He told of his arrest and confinement on the schooner away up in the Northern seas, of his release only because it was necessary to use his knowledge of navigation, of the disguise put on the schooner so she could enter the Eastern ports unknown, and of his escape by the first chance he had and instant exposure of the disguised pirate.

"And, now that I have found you here safe—all that I love and care for on earth—I shall at once write to the captain of the frigate in New York, avowing myself the author of the letter he received and offering my services as a pilot to hunt the pirate down and to assist in his destruction."

"My son, you are right! It is your only honorable course!" said the mother, looking on that manly form through a mist of tears.

"But, dear mother—we may lose him just as soon as found. He will be killed if ever the pirates are within reach of him!" cried Sadie.

"Alas, yes! Let those whose business it is to make war and hunt down pirates do the work they are paid to do. Remain with those to whom your life is so precious!"

And Melisse wept while she spoke.

"My daughters, both, listen to me!" interposed Monsieur Duprét, gently, but firmly. "It seems that this arch fiend, the red-plumed pirate, whose deeds of cruelty and rapacity have horrified the civilized world, has become infatuated with Miss Ridgewood's beauty, and has sworn to possess her. While he lives, has a crew to follow his lead, and a plank to float upon, he is dangerous! Those whom he seeks to injure are in constant, deadly peril! And our hero, here, will know no peace or safety until this Spirifort is slain and his followers destroyed!"

"His bold, brave offer of service to the Government, as well as his first action after escaping from the pirate will tend to lift his character above reproach, and to prove that his stay among such vile wretches was enforced and not voluntary. Therefore I, who love him well, say to him—write at once upon the good impulse in your heart. Go and do your duty, and that done, return here for the reward which faith and love will render. As your mother's guests, Melisse and I will stay and help to guard your dear sister should danger approach!"

These words from Monsieur Duprét conquered all opposition on the part of the girls. And in less than half an hour the letter written over his full, real name was mailed to Captain Dallas of the frigate in New York. And in it young Ridgewood advised that a war-vessel be kept near Baltimore in case the pirate, in his desperate mood, should venture into the bay.

The offer was made to go at once on board of such vessel as might be selected, and to pilot her and her consorts to all the pirate's haunts until he could be found and taken or destroyed.

This letter mailed, Ridgewood sought all the enjoyment he could in the presence of his loved ones, while he waited for a reply to his letter. That, as the mails ran, would be apt to come on the second day after his offer was mailed.

Telegraphic messages were yet unknown, nor were mail facilities near so rapid then as now, as the reader will understand.

Returning home—what home seemed now to one who had so long been a homeless wanderer of the seas—young Ridgewood felt as if he was entering Heaven after a close inspection of the other place.

What seemed most strange to him was that Sadie, his own sister, seemed more shy in his presence than fair Melisse. But he forgot she was a mere child when he went away—a little thing in pinafore and pantalettes, and he a slender stripling of a boy. Now she was a grown young woman, very retired, little caring for and but little used to society, and he, tall, broad-chested, muscular, and weather-bronzed—an almost herculean young man. No wonder she was almost afraid of him when she thought of his late terrible associations.

That evening, while Sadie and Monsieur Duprét were intent over a game of chess, and the fair Melisse was trying some new music, young Ridgewood managed to get his mother in her private closet, where he could deposit his money and valuables in her strong box where she kept her silver, etc. He did not reveal to her the

value of the contents of his belts, for he did not then think it best.

He felt better when he was free from them. Then he slipped out to the police station, and without giving any special reason beyond the nervous fears of the household, asked that a special watch should be kept by the police of that beat on the Ridgewood Mansion and any suspicious persons interviewed who were seen near it.

This done, he sought the side of Melisse Duprét to spend all the time he could with her prior to the receipt of an answer to his offer to the captain in New York. For, once separated from her in the line of this new duty, he did not know how long it would keep them apart. One thing gave his mind ease: her father had promised to remain with her there till he returned, no matter how long he was gone.

That was a happy evening to the rover. He received from his affianced love her miniature, painted on ivory by her uncle, the priest, who was, though an amateur, a very skillful artist. It was an excellent likeness of the lovely girl, and, incased in a locket of heavy gold attached to a slender chain, he hung it over his heart as an inestimable treasure. And when, at a late hour, he retired to his chamber—the same he had slept in when a boy—it was with a thankful and a hopeful heart.

Thankful that he was once more beneath that roof, hopeful of a future as bright as contrast could make it from the dark, dark past.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FIEND'S RECONNOITER.

BUT few words were exchanged between Spirifort and Lieutenant James, his new executive, after the swift and unresisted capture of the unfortunate oyster-schooner. All their plans had been laid and well arranged in the privacy of the pirate's cabin.

As soon as he had disposed of the hapless crew of the oysterman, Spirifort filled away, and crowding all sail on the little craft, ran for a couple of miles or so on the same course with the Diablocito, to test the speed of his prize. He found her to be very fast, though no match for the larger vessel under the same sail.

Well satisfied with her speed, and finding a good stock of provisions in her hold, he determined to set out at once on his expedition up the bay.

Hailing Lieutenant James, he said:

"I shall bear up for Baltimore now. Look for us in the lagoon in four or five days!"

"If you have good luck, you mean!" cried his lieutenant.

"No fear there. Satan never deserts me. Nor do I fail in anything I plan!"

The oyster-boat was now hauled sharp on a wind, and with her lee rail well down to the water she headed in between the capes.

The Diablocito, which had shortened sail while in company with the other, now crowded on again and bore away on her course, calculating to pass Hatteras in the night and to be ready to run into the inlet with the earliest light of another day, so as to gain her hiding-place unseen.

The oyster-boat was a sharp flat of very fine model, between eighty and ninety tons in measurement, and, loaded, her best point of sailing was on the wind. As she could hardly lay her course up the bay, requiring a tack now and then, it was handy to have so many men to tend sheets and work her. The river pirate was not only a good pilot, but knew many men in the oyster trade who did not know his late nefarious business in New York, so the plan to say if questioned, that Spirifort had bought the boat, cargo and all, and shipped a new crew, could be easily carried out with his aid.

All that night, keeping watch and watch, one-half the men on deck at a time, the schooner beat up the bay, and by noon the next day they were so far up that they stood on under easy sail, so as not to run in to a wharf at Baltimore until night had again set in.

"The wind is fresh from the west. After we have done our work, we can cut and run for it, and be half-way to sea before day dawns."

This was Spirifort's remark to his pilot and mate.

"We should all understand just what work is before us, so as to know how to do it," said the pilot in reply.

"You are right," replied Spirifort; then he called up his men and told them his plans of action.

"I shall leave our pilot here and one man on board when I take the other nine on shore with me. They will keep the sails loose, ready for hoisting; leave light fasts out that can be cut in a second, and be ready to be off in haste when we return. I shall leave the schooner a little before midnight, so as to reach the house I intend to visit by or before that time. There I expect to find the traitor who deserted us in New York and evidently got men-of-war after us in chase. If he is there, he dies on the spot by my hand. Remember, he is my game, and no one but I must raise a hand to him. Before he deserted he stole quite a lot of treasure belonging to the Diablocito and her crew. That I hope to recover with more plunder of value, such as we can carry off with ease.

"There will be one bit of treasure there which I claim for myself, not only for revenge on the traitor Marvel, but for my own purposes. It is a woman. She must be bound and gagged, and carried off unscathed—not even insulted by a rude word.

"We may do all this in safety, without creating an alarm, for at so late an hour the streets will be deserted. But if an alarm is raised, we can easily beat off a few policemen armed with clubs or cut them down if they try to stop our way.

"We must, no matter what the odds be, fight our way back to this deck with all our plunder, and then we are safe. Do you all understand me?"

"We do!" was the ready response.

"All right! In the plunder we get to-night you shall all share equally with myself. But the woman must hear no rude words, receive no insult. You all know me! I reward the obedient—the disobedient die!"

No more was said. The men supped early, for the spires and towers and monuments of Baltimore were in sight. At about nine o'clock, under a jib only, the schooner glided slowly into a berth at the end of a wharf that seemed entirely unoccupied. Only a couple of canal-boats and an old scow were near, and they were inside and did not seem to have any men on board.

As soon as the schooner was fast and her last sail lowered, Spirifort started ashore to reconnoiter, leaving orders for every man to wait his return in quiet. He wore an old sou'wester tarpaulin hat, whose ear-flaps hung over his scarred face, and was dressed in rough, shaggy clothes that completely disguised him.

Thus appareled, bending his tall form in a stooping, lounging gait, he did not look nearly as large as he really was. He moved rapidly on until he reached Calvert street, and from the opposite side glared into the open windows of the Ridgewood mansion.

And a bitter curse rose from his lips when he not only saw Madame Ridgewood and her lovely daughter, but Marvel himself and the fair girl whom he had seen in the Bower of Roses at Labrador. Also a stately and noble-looking old gentleman, whom he justly supposed to be her father.

"So—so! The double-distilled traitor had his sweet love ready to meet him! Maybe she is already his wife? No matter! I will carry off two women instead of one, to-night!"

Thus muttering to himself, Spirifort went up the street a little ways and crossed over. Then coming down close by the windows, he took another searching look inside on the evidently happy group. Furious, he put his hand on a pistol concealed inside his vest. He longed to kill Marvel then and there. But he controlled himself. It would spoil the rest of his plan. He needed his men with him.

Gnashing his teeth in fury, he turned and went to the schooner. His eyes blazed with hate as he told his men that he had seen Marvel there, and he bade them look well to their arms.

He would not wait till slow midnight to do his work. It was not a long distance from the wharf to the house. He would break in on them in the height of their happiness, like the destroying fiend that he was, and leaving the dead behind him, bear the living to his schooner, and then scud away before the northwest gale which blew so strong and fair for his escape.

He was so eager and ferocious now, that at ten o'clock, while the streets had yet many stragglers passing to and fro, he mustered his men, whose arms were well concealed by their coarse clothing, and started for the scene of action.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BLOW STRUCK AND THE SEA CHASE.

THERE was one thing that neither Madame Ridgewood nor her daughter, nor their guests could do. They could not induce young Ridgewood to speak of the terrible life he had been forced to lead. With a shudder he refused to describe the horrors of such an existence.

But there were plenty of other things to talk about—the winter life which Monsieur Duprét and his child led in icy, snow-bound Labrador, the habits of the natives, the short but lovely summer-time, and all that.

A sigh from sweet Melisse attracted the notice of her lover.

"Why that sigh of sadness?" he asked.

"Because I fear that to-morrow will bring a letter that will take you away from us for weeks, perhaps months!" she answered.

"No matter, darling, if it only gives us future peace and safety. We are young and full of loving faith, and can wait for happiness!"

"Ah—what is that? Some one at the door? Maybe a letter comes by hand!" said Mrs. Ridgewood, as the door-signal rapped out on the stillness of the night.

A servant had hurried to answer the call, and in less than a minute a heavy fall in the hall was heard. He had been stricken down, and a horde of armed men rushed headlong into the parlor.

"Spirifort—and I unarmed!" cried young Ridgewood, as he sprang forward to grapple with the pirate chief.

"Dog of a traitor, die!" yelled the pirate, fir-

ing his pistol as it almost touched the young man's breast.

Without a moan the young man fell to the floor, while his mother dropped swooning on his body.

Monsieur Duprét, for want of a better weapon, brandished a heavy mahogany chair and brought it down with terrible force on the head of a pirate who had clasped his shrieking daughter in his rude arms. The man fell crushed and bleeding to the floor, and the gallant old man turned to strike another blow, but Spirifort with a bound passed a short, keen-bladed sword through and through his body.

The rattle of police clubs reached their ears now, and shouts from a man left at the door warned the pirates that help was coming for those whom they assailed.

"Quick—seize the girls and be off!" cried Spirifort, as he spurned poor Duprét's bleeding body aside. "Hal! The police in force! We must fight our way to the boat. Lead the way, Rupert Strongalo—I will cover the rear; forward at once!"

Two men, pushing their rude garments into the mouths of the screaming girls, seized and lifted them like babes in their arms, and while, with a drawn cutlass, the man Spirifort had called on led the way out, cleaving down all opposition, Spirifort himself covered the rear, cutting down every man that came within the sweep of his blade.

Rushing toward the wharf, while the small body of police fought as best they could, some of them using pistols but fearing to kill the girls they strove to save, the pirates made their way.

Twice Spirifort was badly hit with bullets, but shooting back and slashing right and left, he fought his way onward and at last, and in a short time, too, they reached the schooner.

The pilot had heard the sounds of battle, and he and the other man had jib and foresail hoisted.

Just the instant the almost exhausted pirates touched the deck, Spirifort cried faintly:

"Cut loose!"

Every fast was cut and the schooner shot out on the dark waters, leaving the baffled pursuers behind, wild with their defeat, for nearly every policeman was badly hurt and three had been killed outright.

Away—swift as canvas hurriedly hoisted could drive her, flew the fleet schooner, and in a little while, driving before the gale, Spirifort, with his two prizes securely bound in the cabin, had time to look to his own losses and have his wounds cared for, as well as those of his men.

None were hurt so badly that they could not do some duty, their leader being hardest hit of all. He had a broken left arm and a bullet in his thigh. Rude was the surgery there, but one of his men cut splinters from an oar and with stiff canvas for bandages put the broken arm in the best shape possible. The other wounded men were looked to as well, and food and drink given to keep up their strength.

Not until they were leagues down the bay almost running bows under from the press of sail, did Spirifort take time to speak to his captives.

Then he had them unbound, and though guarded, they were pointed to a small, windowless room with a wide berth in it.

"Miss Ridgewood, we meet under rough circumstances, and your accommodations are poor; but soon, in the luxurious cabin of the Diablocito you and your fair companion shall have better quarters!"

"Murderer! We ask no favor at your hands!" she said. "Kill me even as you slew my brave brother!"

"He met the fate of a traitor," was the sneering answer. "Beware how you anger me, for there are fates which are worse than death. I have rough men and angry ones here who are not always under control. If you would have any mercy shown you use prudence with your musical tongue. You and your friend will be safe in that room for the present. Take my advice and retire!"

"Come! All is not lost!" gently whispered poor Melisse, drawing the hot-blooded belle of Baltimore with her into the room.

At that instant the sound of cannon-shots boomed like distant thunder on the air.

"Curse them! They fire from the fort to alarm revenue-cutters or war-vessels if there are any around!" cried Spirifort. "Crowd every rag the sticks will bear upon the craft! The sooner we are at sea the better for us!"

"She has all she can stand up under!" said a man who came from on deck, where the pilot was in charge. "We never have any luck up here, captain!"

"We have luck—but it is bad. One good man is gone—but we killed two in the house and a half-dozen in the street to pay for his life. The traitor, Marvel, has got his reward! How does it look on deck?"

"Dark and nasty, but the pilot runs by compass. He says we have plenty of room. We are going too fast for soundings—he says we mark our twelve knots, and the Diablocito couldn't do much better!"

"Very good! Stay here—watch that room—see that the two girls stay where they are. I am going on deck for a while!"

Limping, painfully, the pirate crept out upon the spray-washed deck.

As he reached the side of the pilot he asked him where they were.

"Broadside to Annapolis now—about six miles clear. Do you see the light there?"

"Yes. Do you suppose there are any cutters or men-o'-war in the bay?"

"There is no knowing. You see I have the binnacle-light hid except the bare room for me to see the compass. All other lights are out. Ah—look there. We must run northward three points more till she is by!"

He pointed to some bright lights almost ahead.

"What do you think it is?" asked Spirifort, nervously.

"A bay steamer—burning wood. I can see the sparks from her chimneys."

The schooner's course was altered, and none too soon, for in a few minutes the great steamer swept up the bay, the sound of her paddle-wheels heard distinctly above the turmoil of wind and wave.

"Do you think they saw us?" asked Spirifort.

"No; if they had they would have tapped their bell. It is well we have no lights out, and canvas don't show in a cloudy night with neither moon or stars in sight. But we must be on the lookout every second. The bay is full of vessels always, but it blows too hard for small craft to be out when they can make safe anchorage!"

Satisfied with the fidelity of his pilot, after seeing that all the lookouts were wide awake, Spirifort crept wearily down into the cabin again, and laid his weak form out on the cushioned transom-piece, where soon, from sheer weakness, as well as from mental strain, he dropped off into an uneasy slumber.

And there he lay until broad daylight streamed through the small cabin windows upon him.

Waking with a start he rose and sprung to his feet. A groan broke from his lips in spite of a stern endeavor to suppress it. His wounded thigh, terribly inflamed with the bullet still there, pained him so much that great drops of sweat poured from his forehead.

"A few hours more and the surgeon of the Diablocito will help me!" he muttered.

Then glancing at the guard near the door of the little room he asked:

"Are the captives safe?"

"Yes—they sit there, pale, silent, and sleepless!"

"It is well. They'll improve by and by. No woman lives who can remain silent long!"

Again the pirate crept on deck. They were down in the broadest part of the bay. The sea was heavy. The wind had so freshened that, running with it on the quarter, the pilot had been forced to take in the gaff, topsail and single reef the fore and mainsail, while the flying jib was furled to its boom.

Only a few vessels were in sight, and they seemed to be creeping in under close reefs to find a harbor.

"We are safe!" cried Spirifort, exultingly.

"In two or three hours we will be on the open sea!"

"The open sea, if this gale keeps rising, may not be so safe, after all!" said the pilot, gravely.

"If we were in any other snap than this, I'd advise looking out for a good anchorage in a safe harbor. But we don't know what may have been sent after us!"

"True, and we've got to take our chances outside, safe or unsafe though they be. The moment we can luff along the land we must do it, keeping as close as possible for a lee!"

"There are too many sand-spits off the coast for us to risk inshore work!" said the pilot.

"We'll have to give them a wide berth. But I'll do the best I can!"

"No one can do more. Go below, now, and get some food and drink while I keep the vessel to her course. You mustn't wear yourself out just yet. I'll need all you can do when we get down the coast near the hiding-place!"

The pilot went down into the cabin and ate a hearty meal, washing it down with strong coffee instead of spirits. He was an old hand at sea, and had weathered many a tough gale. He knew what was best for him.

An hour later he came on deck, refreshed and strong as ever. He glanced at the compass and then at a light-house seen broad on the starboard bow.

"We can come to, a bit, now, and make a little more southing!" he said. "But we'll have to take in another reef, fore and aft, to stand up under it."

"All right; reef in and shape her course!" ordered Spirifort.

This was done, and with the wind now nearly abeam, the schooner headed nearly three points outside of the light, a course which would carry her clear of the cape.

"Sail ho!" shouted one of the men who was standing forward.

"Whereaway?" demanded Spirifort.

"Two points off our lee bow, sir—a square-rigged ship coming up the coast under topsails and courses!"

Spirifort went forward with the old spy-glass in his hand that he found becketed to the binnacle and looked at her.

Coming aft quickly, he said to the pilot:

"That craft looks like a man-of-war! If so, she is making port. What had we best do? If she should heave us to and search us, we're lost!"

"What infernal luck is ours. If she is making port, she'll run into Hampton Roads. And the course we're on will throw us across her hawser, and close aboard at that!"

"Then shift it at once. We must run no risk like that. She is hull up now!"

Instantly the pilot gave the order to slack off sheets, and once more the schooner, with the wind nearly aft, headed out to sea.

Anxiously Spirifort watched the ship.

"She comes up with the wind almost abeam like a race-horse!" he remarked.

"Let me take the glass," said the pilot. "I can tell by the way she heads whether she means to run into the Roads or not!"

His face was pale when he handed the glass back to Spirifort.

"She is a sloop-of-war and a clipper to go!" he muttered. "She is under whole topsails and courses and stands up to it stiff as a church!"

"But her course! Is she going into the Roads?"

"No. That is the worst of it. She is coming right up the coast, and in a heavy sea way, fast as we are, she'll beat us! We must get into smoother and shoaler water if you don't want her in gunshot!"

"Then put her there—for once under his guns we're lost if he should take it in his head to over-haul us!"

Quickly as it could be done with safety, the schooner, being dead before the wind, was jibed over, her heavy boom swung to starboard, and now with sheets trimmed in she headed up the coast instead of down.

Her course, too, was more inshore, to seek smoother water. And now she plunged forward, with the wind a little forward of the beam, every spar bending to the stiff gale.

Spirifort kept his glass on the ship that now came along nearly astern.

"She gains on us—slow but sure!" he said, with a groan.

"If she isn't in gunshot within an hour, she'll have to keep outside of us. I'll be in shoal water then," assured the pilot, who now took the helm in person.

"They're setting top-gallant sail and luffing fairly into our wake!" cried Spirifort, fiercely gnashing his teeth, as he threw the glass down.

"They suspect us, or they would not chase. Ten thousand curses on such luck! Hal! What are you doing there?"

The last angry cry was directed to Sadie Ridgewood and her fair friend. Both stood in the cabin hatchway looking at the ship.

"Looking at our friends and your enemies," answered Sadie, calmly.

"Back—back to the cabin, or rude hands will thrust you there!" shouted the pirate. "Guards—do your duty, and keep the prisoners where they belong!"

The poor girls knew it was madness to resist, and with one longing glance at the great ship astern they went below.

The schooner now plunged madly on toward the northwest, heading just clear of the cape in that direction. Every man but the guard placed over the girls was on deck.

Suddenly a puff of smoke was seen springing from a bow port in the sloop-of-war and a round shot came plunging into the water close astern of the schooner.

"Shake out every reef!" yelled Spirifort. "We'll drive her under if we cannot outsail the enemy!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE STRICKEN HOME.

WHEN the police, or such of them as had not been injured in the terrible affray with the escaped pirates, reentered the mansion of Madame Ridgewood, they found the terror-stricken servants and a neighboring physician whom they had summoned doing their best to restore the victims of the attack to consciousness.

The lady came to her senses only to learn that the two young ladies had been carried bodily off, and then fell back again in hysterical convulsions.

Believing, as the servants reported, that the young man was stone dead, shot through the heart, the surgeon hastened first to stanch the bleeding from the terrible sword-wound in the body of poor Monsieur Duprét.

The latter believed that he was dying, but he thought not of that; he only moaned out:

"My poor daughter! Would to God she was here to die with me. Heaven shield her in mercy—in mercy!"

A police surgeon was now added to the group, and the captain of the station, maddened to think the pirates had escaped, came in to note casualties in the house.

One dead pirate, with his head crushed in by the heavy chair in Duprét's hands, lay on the floor.

The police surgeon, aided by the captain, lifted the body of young Ridgewood to a sofa, and as they did so a groan broke from his lips and with a faint struggle he sat upright.

"Melisse—my sister—where are they?" were the first words he uttered.

"They are not here; be quiet as you can; let me examine your wound!" cried the surgeon.

"It is nothing! I feel numb all over—that is all! A slight pain here—no more!"

He laid his hand over his heart and then fell back, swooning.

"Brandy—quick!" cried the surgeon, and he poured some between the white lips of the patient.

"My son—is he alive?" gasped Mrs. Ridgewood, as she again became conscious.

"Yes—madam, and saved by this!" cried out the surgeon, as he lifted a shattered picture and broken locket from over the heart of the young man. "The ball has passed through this and stopped on a rib over the heart. Here it is!"

And with his fingers he extracted the deadly missile from the wound.

Revived by the stimulant and rapidly recovering from the shock to his young, vigorous constitution, young Ridgewood asked what had become of the pirates.

"They escaped, after killing three of our force and wounding many more. Their leader seemed to have a charmed life. Twice I shot him with my own hand, and each time he staggered, but did not fall; and finally fought his way to a large oyster schooner, in which he evidently came, for the sails were up and she was off in the darkness the instant he and his men touched the deck!"

"And the ladies?"

"Were carried on board and are gone!"

"Merciful Heaven! Has no attempt been made to follow them?"

"Yes, sir—the revenue-cutter sailed after the pirates as soon as the alarm reached her. Guns, too, were fired from the fort to alarm other vessels that may intercept them. Many of the band must be badly hurt. My men fought nobly, using their clubs and pistols for all they were worth!"

"What vessels are in port? Armed vessels, I mean. They must be followed without an hour's delay! If they get to sea, those poor girls are lost forever. Better a thousand times they had died here!"

"The cutter—the only armed vessel we know of this side of Norfolk—is gone in pursuit now. But news like this will cover the sea with eager pursuers!"

"I must not stay idle here. Mother, I will rescue my sister and dear Melisse or die in avenging them!"

"Melisse—gone, gone forever!" moaned her poor father.

Then, weakened by the loss of blood and intense suffering, he fainted.

"Is he hurt past recovery?" asked young Ridgewood.

"He is very badly hurt, but there is a bare possibility of life, if he is perfectly quiet. He must be held down with sedative medicine; the least excitement will create internal hemorrhage which cannot be stopped."

And the surgeon prepared a potion, which, in wine, was poured between the lips of the unconscious sufferer.

And now the surgeon exhibited to young Ridgewood the shattered picture and the ball which, passing through it, had come so near to ending his life.

"Melisse—my angel—I will yet hope for your safety, since your gift of love has saved my life!" moaned Ridgewood, as he pressed the shattered picture to his lips.

It was dawn before they thought of time in that house of mourning. The dead pirate had been carried to the station-house for the coroner's view, as well as the bodies of the unfortunate policemen who had fallen in the fray.

The city—or rather the citizenry en masse, were wild with excitement over the events of the night. That such an outrage could occur in a great city like that seemed almost beyond belief. The sympathies of the people were terribly aroused, and if ten thousand chivalric men could have been used in pursuit of the daring abductors and murderers—they were there and ready.

Young Ridgewood had seen Monsieur Duprét provided with two careful professional nurses to watch over him night and day, and by words of tender hope and brave encouragement partially quieted his poor mother, when the postman brought him a letter from New York which gave him new hope and life and action to nerve him up.

The letter was from the captain of the frigate, who held chief command of the vessels on the northern station. It ran thus:

"Come on at once! Your offer is received. We are fitting out the largest and fastest armed schooner in our service. She will be ready to sail when you get here, having a picked crew and the best officers in the navy, of their rank, to conduct her. You are rated as pilot, and if you do your duty well you will be rewarded beyond your hopes. We have heard from the pirate twice since she cleared the Narrows, and have no doubt she has sailed for Southern waters. Quite a fleet is out now after her, but we have more hope in your knowledge of her and her haunts than in all the fleets afloat. Come on without an hour's delay after receiving this note.

DALLAS."

Hurriedly young Ridgewood made his prepar-

ations. He wrote a brief letter of consolation full of hopeful sympathy, to be shown to Monsieur Duprét when the latter was able to read it.

He received his mother's tearful blessing and parting caresses and started for the first north-bound train.

His last words to his mother were these:

"I will not rest or falter in the search, dear mother, until I have found my sister and my love! Pray to your God and mine while I am gone that I may be helped and made strong in my work."

CHAPTER XXX. THE SEA HOUND.

WHEN the reefs were shaken out on the oyster schooner, though she almost buried bows under in the sea, she went with greater speed, for her build was such she could carry sail as long as her spars would stand the pressure.

And a cry of triumph told the crew that the ship had ceased to gain on them, for Spirifort measured the distance and speed of both vessels with an eye that scarce ever made a mistake.

Again a shot was fired from the bow chaser of the sloop-of-war and this time it struck the water still further astern. But the chase was not given up. A lower studding-sail was set on the sloop-of-war, though she seemed to have all her spars could bear before.

Now, if she did not gain, she did not lose, and the pirate was obliged to sail a course directly opposite to the one he wished to take.

"This infernal luck is driving us right away from our right track!" muttered Spirifort.

"We can't help ourselves, captain—not yet, at least. I am running for shoal water, and if they have no coast-pilot on yonder craft, and she follows us up, I'll lead her into trouble which will end this chase. I can go far inside of reefs and shoals which will bring her up all standing, and if she strikes in this weather she'll stay where she grounds till there's nothing left of her worth picking up. If she grounds, we can turn on our heel and run for the inlet, where we'll find Scar-faced Jim and the other craft."

"Good! Do your best, and when we get safe on board the Diablocito, I'll give you all the gold you can lift!"

"I like life too well, Cap, to throw it away. I've done my best so far, and sha'n't slack up any while trouble is in sight."

The schooner was now in smoother water, but as she drew in under the lee of the land, low as that land was, the strength of the wind lessened and her speed sensibly decreased.

The gaff topsail and flying-jib were now hoisted, and helped a little.

Often now the pilot turned his eyes toward the ship in chase. Her course, as she drew in with the land, was altered slightly, but enough to keep her outside the shoals.

"Curse it!" he muttered. "The war-dog has somebody on board who knows the coast. She luffs just clear, and that is all. They'll hound us down if we can't keep ahead till night comes on and skip them in the darkness."

The sloop-of-war did indeed have one on board who knew the coast and every shoal on it from the Chesapeake to Long Island Sound. It was the rescued captain of the oyster schooner.

The sloop-of-war had sailed to the south of Hatteras, finding no trace of the pirate or her prize, and her captain had determined to run as far back as Hampton Roads when he saw signs of a coming gale.

Thus, they were off the lower cape when the captive schooner was seen coming out of the Bay. The keen-eyed captain knew his own craft the moment he got the focus of a glass upon her. Thus we know why the chase was made and so persistently kept up.

After the schooner was headed directly up the coast and inside shoals which kept the sloop-of-war outside of gunshot, the pilot told Spirifort all present danger was over if the wind held. They could run to the Capes of the Delaware before the sloop-of-war could get them under fire.

"But," said he, "if we keep going at this rate, we'll be there too soon for our own good. We couldn't take up the Delaware to get out of their reach, for there's always an armed revenue-cutter in at the Breakwater, and she'd cut us off!"

"Then we'll get out a drag and slow up without shortening sail!" said the keen-witted pirate, full of expedients.

The oyster dredges found in the hold were the very things needed for this new device, and soon one was paid out astern, fastened to a long hawser; it lessened their speed so much that the sloop-of-war went ahead hand-over-hand, but too far out to do any damage with her guns.

"The plan works well!" said the pilot. "This will keep us back till night, and then, by compass and lead, I'll beat that fellow sharp as he is."

Until now, so exciting had been their peril, no thought had been given by the pirate chief or his crew to refreshments.

Orders were given to the man selected as cook to prepare the best there was on board, and Spirifort went below to offer his captives food and drink.

They were faint and almost famishing, but they dared not eat or drink what he proffered

them lest they should be drugged into insensibility and helplessness. But—knowing that if ever they were to escape the dreadful perils that environed them, strength was all essential, they ate some hard biscuit and drank some water—refusing coffee and cooked food, though it was proffered, freely, by the wounded and suffering chief.

For, though he kept up, Spirifort was so terribly hurt that every breath was agony. He held little converse with any one, but once or twice he spoke as kindly as his nature would allow to Sadie Ridgewood. But, all the hot Spanish blood in her nature rose up, and she had not one word for the man whom she believed to be the murderer of her brother. For she had seen the latter shot down before her eyes, and poor Melisse also had seen her aged father fall, drenched in blood, as she was seized and Lorne struggling from his side.

The day wore on. The captain of the sloop-of-war, finding he was fast head-reaching on the schooner, was puzzled to know the cause.

The old captain of the latter was the first to suggest the true reason. He knew just what his craft could do under such canvas in such a breeze and that only a drag could hold her back.

"She wants to hold on inside the shoals till dark, sir!" he explained. "Then she'll wear around to the south and try to get away in the darkness."

"It is a game two can play," averred the captain. "If that is her plan she'll find us as far to the south as she is when day dawns. Most likely the larger vessel waits for her in some southern nook or hiding-place. But what they want with your schooner I cannot understand. That she is held by pirates, the numbers on her decks and her actions in avoiding us is sufficient proof. We will not lose her, for she will be apt to lead us to a bigger prize."

Using his lead often, as well as the knowledge of the coasting captain, the commander of the sloop-of-war several times got almost within gunshot of the schooner, but out-laying shoals would necessitate a change of course, and then the distance would be increased.

He had shortened sail so as to keep the "chase" as nearly abeam as he could, but once in awhile she was a little ahead.

On one of these occasions, through his glass he saw two white signals waving through the stern windows of the schooner.

He called the attention of the captain of the oyster boat to it, and handed him the glass.

"By creation, cap'n, I believe there's women in the cabin, and if so, they're prisoners! It looks to me like white arms were shoved out there, wavin' handkerchiefs for help! The stern of the schooner overhangs, so they couldn't be seen at it from her deck. While I was on her there was never but one woman in that cabin. Afore my boy was born my wife used to take a trip now and then with me. I had a little room fitted up for her on purpose. Since she had my little Wa Wa to care for she has staid at home, for the youngster is safest there. He crept and climbed like a regular tar afore he was six months old!"

"Gold help the captives, if such there be, and they women!" sighed the captain of the war-ship. "There is no mercy in a pirate's heart—if hearts they have."

The day wore on, and before the shades of night fell, going as they did, the light-house on Henlopen loomed up in view from both the chaser and the chased.

Not until night set in fairly, darkness hiding one from the other completely, did Spirifort dare to change his course. Then the drag was cut adrift, and the schooner wore around, heading south—not a light in sight on her deck or below which could throw a gleam toward the chasers.

At that same hour a spar buoy was lowered from the deck of the sloop-of-war, with a lantern affixed to the spar. And exultantly, as they sped southward, the pirates looked at that light fading away to the northward, thinking it shone on board of their too persistent enemy!

But, she, too, had played her ruse, and done it well, for even when the light was dropped astern, the sloop-of-war had squared away for the south, and showing no glimmer of light, making no noise, under all the sail she could carry, she was heading for an offing near the capes, or as far south as she could run before dawn, where and when, taking in all sail, her captain's plan was to wait for a sight of the cunning and tricky pirates.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE FLYING SHARK.

WITHIN a half-hour after the train reached New York from Baltimore, Edward Marvel Ridgewood reported on board the frigate as directed by the letter from her captain. The frigate lay at moorings in the North river, about a mile above Castle Garden, and Ridgewood hired a row-boat to take him alongside.

He found the captain ready and anxious to see him. A long and searching interview followed, and the captain was startled to hear of the recent horrible outrage in Baltimore, which news

was brought on the same train on which the young ex-pirate came, and was spread over the city in "extras" by the newspaper-men in a few hours.

"Every available vessel but the Shark and this frigate are now out!" said the captain. "It is necessary that I should remain here to receive and act on reports from vessels coming in. But the Shark, the schooner I alluded to in my letter to you, is, or should be, ready to sail now. She was to come over from the Navy Yard, ready for sea, this morning. Her commander's instructions are ready—here is a copy for your guidance. You are her pilot, and the commander is to act with you in this search. I know from your own sufferings, as well as the terrible suspense you must feel in regard to the fate of those unfortunate ladies, that you will almost move heaven and earth to find the wretch who abducted them. The moment the captain of the schooner reports, you must be off. Every hour lost with us, is a gain to the fiends who evade us!"

"You are right, sir, and I am ready. My heart burns to be on a chase which I will never willingly relinquish while Spirifort or one of his fiendish gang is left alive!"

"The schooner Shark is standing up the river, toward us, sir, with the signal 'ready for sea,' flying!"

This was the report of the midshipman of the watch, sent in by the officer of the deck.

"All right, sir! Tell Mr. Hoe to order her to heave her head-sails aback, and I will go on board with the pilot and final instructions. Have my gig manned at once!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

In a few minutes the captain of the frigate and Marvel were in the fast-rowing gig, being sent swiftly through the water by six stalwart oarsmen in the direction of the Shark, which, with every sail set up to royals, forward, was lying, hove to, a cable's length to leeward of the frigate.

"Does she look as if she would be a match for the pirate, should you encounter her yard-arm and yard-arm?" asked the captain, gazing with pride on the fastest and heaviest vessel of her class then in the navy.

"She carries eighteen guns, two long thirty-twos on pivot, and sixteen broadside twenty-four-pounders. For a crew, one hundred and ten picked men, and nearly a double set of officers!"

"She will more than match the accursed pirate, sir, with *right* on her side!" was the prompt reply of the pilot.

In a minute more they were alongside the jaunty schooner and over her low bulwarks, where the lieutenant commanding, and a group of noble-looking officers stood ready to receive the captain.

"Lieutenant Chandler, I introduce you to Mr. Ridgewood, your pilot on this expedition. He is the young man who escaped from the pirate and gave knowledge of her to us, and I hope with his help you will be able to overhaul her and either capture or utterly destroy her. If captured, you will all be rich in prize-money! Mr. Ridgewood says she has an immense amount of treasure on board!"

"We will do our best, captain!" replied the lieutenant. "Mr. Ridgewood is welcome. His looks speak for him as a gentleman, and he will share my cabin with me!"

Ridgewood bowed low, touched to the heart with this generous welcome.

"Here are your instructions, Mr. Chandler," continued the captain. "I have given Mr. Ridgewood a copy. Now fill away and. God speed you; I will not keep you back a second!"

A grasp of his junior's hand and the gallant captain was piped over the side and his boat's crew held their oars aspeak as the bowman pushed the boat clear, while the orders came clear and sharp:

"Brace up the head-yards—hard up the helm—draw sheets and fill away!"

While the yards flew around and the clipper-built schooner gathered way, her crew, at a signal from their young commander, gave three rousing cheers for the captain of the frigate, who waved his cap in response.

But away, on board his own gallant ship, the cheer was heard, and six hundred sturdy throats gave back the compliment in cheers which rung far and wide over the glittering waters of the lovely bay.

The cheer was returned, as the schooner, with her sails swelling to a fresh breeze that held nearly abeam, gathered way and shot off down the bay at a speed which both pleased and surprised young Ridgewood.

Turning to the lieutenant in command, he said:

"Your schooner, sir, comes the nearest in speed and management to the craft we go in search of, of anything I have ever seen afloat. She is a beauty and a wonder to go!"

"I am glad to hear you say so, Mr. Ridgewood. I was her first lieutenant on a two years' cruise on the coast of Africa, and I know just about what she can do! She never before had so strong a crew, nor such a full complement of officers!"

"She will need them all, sir, when we fall in

with the Diablocito. For her captain and crew, so to speak, will fight with ropes about their necks and battle with the desperation of men who know they will find no mercy, if they yield!"

"That is to be expected. As the harbor pilot takes us to sea, come into the cabin and I will show you your future quarters, after we have had a glass of wine together. When we are at sea, and you feel at home, you can tell me just as much of your life on board the pirate as you choose to do, of your own free will—no more. I am not given to curiosity, though from the start I feel a desire to be your friend!"

"Thank you, lieutenant! Never did a man need friendship and true manly sympathy more than I. I have just left a mother almost dying, a prospective father-in-law almost hopelessly wounded, and two nights ago my only sister and my betrothed were abducted from my mother's house, while I, stricken down by a wound which would have killed me but for this, was helpless to aid them!"

"And was this the work of the pirate we are sent after?" cried the lieutenant, as he gazed upon the shattered and bullet-pierced picture and locket.

"It was! Spirifort's pistol was at my breast when I sprung forward, unarmed as I was, to interpose my form between him and those I loved! How he got there—how he escaped—no one can exactly tell. He went off in a sharp-built oyster schooner, but his own craft could not have been far away. He never would leave his powerful crew where they could not come to his help if he got in a tight place!"

"Horrible!" said the lieutenant, as he led the way into his cabin. "It is fearful to think of those pure, fair young girls in the power of such a fiend!"

"It almost maddens me, sir!" said Ridgewood. "My only hope now is in you, your brave crew and this noble vessel. If we find the pirate we must not hesitate a second. Better that my loved ones be riddled with our own shot than live to be the victims of fiends in human shape. I would rather slay them with my own hand than know they must live in his power. For he has no honor—no conscience. He is a devil, if devils ever move upon the earth or sea!"

"Well—we will hope, and pray, and strive hard to get at him as soon as may be. I have not looked over the instructions, but we will both scan them closely ere we reach the open sea. My own idea is that he may yet be hovering about our coast. I have a singular fancy. After we have taken a glass of wine, I will picture it out to you!"

Standing at a well-furnished sideboard in the cabin, the two young men pledged each other in a glass of sherry.

Then, taking a seat, and handing another to Ridgewood, the lieutenant went on:

"I have always had a morbid desire to trace the history of crime and great criminals as depicted in books and newspapers. And I have found, in almost all cases, that, though a criminal might escape for a time, justice is almost universally triumphant, and the criminal rarely escapes the felon's doom. And—in nine cases out of ten, when a murderer has committed his bloody work, he lingers around the scene of his crime as if infatuated, until he is detected and taken. Like a spider who has drawn a fly within the meshes of his net, he is drawn nearer and nearer to his victim until he is himself entrapped."

"And on this theory, I hope that this bloody wretch may hover somewhere along our coast till we get our eyes on him. That done, you may rest at ease on one point: I shall never leave his wake till he is under my guns. Then—God helping me—his career will come to a speedy end, or you and I will have our pay stopped for this world!"

The lieutenant now showed Ridgewood a neat, well-furnished state-room, exactly like one opposite that he used himself. On a beam overhead a bright, keen cutlass shone in its brackets—a weapon fit for service in hands that were used to it.

"You have your own pistols I presume; if not, I have a pair of fine ones at your service," said the officer.

"I will accept their loan!" answered Ridgewood, "for I did not take time to fit myself with good weapons when I hurried on to join you. I had a pair when I left the pirate—but those were in my chamber when we were attacked, for I did not dream of such daring as Spirifort evinced—coming upon us in the heart of a great city, the streets full of people, with only a handful of men at full an hour or more before our regular bedtime!"

"The very audacity of the thing made it seem possible to him!" said the lieutenant. "It was desperately bold, and if the police captain reported truly, he got badly hurt before he escaped. This, too, may be in our favor!"

They now went on deck, for the swift schooner was already in the Narrows and under the frowning batteries of Fort Lafayette, then in fair condition. Together the young commander and his new pilot paced the quarter-deck, while the schooner with every kite aloft that she could

swing, dashed through the yielding waters as if eager to kiss the azure lips of "the dark blue sea."

CHAPTER XXXII.

UNDER FIRE.

THE signals that seemed to be waved from the windows of the captured oyster schooner were indeed made by the two captive girls. Plainly they could see that the great man-of-war, its side pierced with guns, its deck full of officers and men, and their only hope for life and honor lay with her. If she could once bring the schooner under fire, they would either find rescue or death.

So far they had not been subjected to any insult, but they did not know how long that state of security might last. They felt that fiends held them in their power, and they had little of good to expect from them. Only in the weak, almost helpless state in which his wounds left Spirifort, did they feel any safety from him. While he was striving to escape from pursuit, if they could only draw the pursuers nearer by any action or signal, they would do it.

Fortunately for them, the pirates did not discover the window signals seen from the sloop-of-war. They had been left unguarded in the cabin during the day, since escape was impossible and the men were wanted on deck.

But, when night drew near, and they saw that the ship-of-war had got no nearer, the poor captives began to despair. Until then, it seemed to them as if the schooner could not escape the strict and stern watch kept over her.

When darkness came all lights were ordered out, and then noiselessly, suddenly, the course of the vessel was changed, as they easily discovered by her careening to the other side, and with all her sails spread, she swept swiftly back upon her old track. Then—despair entered those young hearts, and the poor girls wept in bitter hopelessness as they clasped each other in an embrace of wretched but unfaltering love.

They too saw the light which the pirates supposed to be on board their enemy, and while the men on board laughed gleefully, the hearts of the poor girls sunk lower and lower in gloom as the light faded from sight.

Running at night, among dangerous shoals and only by compass now, the schooner pilot had to have the sounding lead kept going constantly, and more than once the dash of breakers reaching the ears of Spirifort told him the dangers they were encountering.

It also forced them to lessen their speed very materially, for they had to luff up when the lead was cast to get bottom, and that so far checked their way that it was near daylight when they passed the lights of the Virginian capes.

As the wind held fresh off-shore, and the shoals were less dangerous south of the capes, the pilot kept his luff and swung in as near the shore as he dared, intending to run inside of the dangerous shoals of Hatteras in a narrow channel used only by the boldest of the coasters.

The poor girls had slept a little by turns during the night, they were so utterly worn out with grief and anxiety. They dared not both go to sleep at the same time, for they had vowed to resist any entrance to their little room, and having each secured a sharp knife from the pantry during the day, they kept them concealed on their persons, but ready for use.

Spirifort, weak with intense suffering, slept in the outer cabin on a bunk a part of the night, and one or more of the pirates kept guard below, while a strict watch was maintained on deck all the night, forward and aft as well.

Spirifort had issued orders that he be called at the first glimpse of day, and it was done.

As soon as it was light enough to use the spy-glass, he began to scan all the surroundings. He was almost alarmed to be so near the sandy beach, but the leadsman called out "a quarter twain," and he knew there was water to spare in an eight-foot draught.

Seeing nothing shoreward to alarm him, he looked away to the north. Far, very far away in that direction he saw two or three tiny specks, which he knew to be sails. They were too far away to annoy his mind, strained though it was. Then he looked ahead, and far as the eye could reach almost a straight expanse of low, sandy coast and outside of that unbroken water, green and shallow, met his gaze.

"So far, all right!" he muttered.

Then he took in the eastern horizon, tinged with flecks of red and black as the sun began to rise around the mass of clouds which swept athwart the heavens.

Suddenly his glass rested on a point about three or four points forward of the beam—or, in fact, nearly off the lee bow. And it stayed there for several minutes.

"What do you see, Cap?" asked the pilot, for Spirifort, though silent, looked anxious.

"It may be a wreck—I see no canvas—or it may be a craft at anchor—thereaway!" he replied, pointing with his hand.

"No vessel, if she could help it, would ever anchor out there!" declared the pilot. "We'll soon have a better view, for I have to keep away and make some coasting. There is a long sand-spit or shoal which makes out ahead, and I have

to go around it. That cleared, I can bear away for Hatteras!"

As he said this, the pilot so altered his course that he brought the object nearly ahead which had attracted the attention of the pirate chief.

The schooner, under all sail now but gaff-top-sail, staysail and flying-jib, flew gayly through the water, and the pilot remarked:

"If this wind holds, before night I'll have you alongside the Diablocito in her snug harbor!"

"I am glad to hear it!" assured Spirifort. "I shall be in agony till our surgeon gets this ball out of my thigh and re-dresses my broken arm. Our boys have done the best they could, but I suffer untold agony. I'll go below and get a glass of liquor to strengthen me. I'll be back in a few minutes."

"The old man's minutes count half an hour," muttered the pilot, as Spirifort delayed his return. "Look out, one of you sleepy-heads forward, and see if there is any craft in sight thereaway! The cap'n saw something before he went below!"

"Jumpin' Moses!" yelled the man. "Here are breakers just under our lee bow!"

"I know that!" cried the pilot, coolly. "It is the point of the shoal I'm going around!"

"Worse yet. There is a full-rigged ship square ahead of us—at anchor, I reckon!"

"At anchor in forty-fathom water, you fool? You're blind drunk, aren't you? The water runs deep outside here!"

"Come and see for yourself!" growled the man.

"Take the helm one of you, and another throw the lead!" cried the pilot, as he took the spy-glass up, and went forward.

He gave one look at the ship which had been reported, and with a cry of alarm rushed aft.

"Bear in to the land two points—not one inch more for your lives, or we're on the point of the spit!" he cried to the man at the helm.

Then, putting his head down the cabin hatch-way, he shouted:

"Come on deck, cap'n, quick! A full-rigged ship is laying off not more than five or six miles, maybe less, and if she isn't a man-o'-war, I never saw one!"

Forgetting for the instant the agony which had made him so faint that he had to lie down when he went below, Spirifort hurried on deck, groaning and cursing as he came.

Taking the glass, he glanced toward the vessel now in plain view.

She was large, square-rigged, but not a sail was set, neither could a man be seen aloft or below. She was evidently pierced for guns, but her ports were closed—not a muzzle could be seen—neither flag nor pennant at peak or mast-head.

"I cannot make it out. She looks like a deserted ship drifting inshore!" he said to the pilot, who had also come forward.

"Shall we run closer—get a plainer sight of her?" asked the latter.

"No—no! She may be plague-stricken. If I've got to die I want no plague to help me. Keep your course, and get us alongside my own good craft as soon as may be!"

The schooner was now close to the breakers on the point. Yet the lead gave them five fathoms clear, water enough to float a frigate.

Suddenly a cry of wonder and alarm broke from every man who stood forward.

The ship which had seemed to drift tenantless on the ocean was full of life! Men were seen to spring aloft and out on every yard; the sails were loosed as if by magic, sheeted home and hoisted as they fell from the furling gaskets. And, as she gathered steerage-way, her ports flew open and a long row of broadside guns were seen ready to belch forth their iron contents.

"Tricked—tricked like fools!" groaned Spirifort. "It is the same ship which chased us yesterday!"

"Ay, the very same!" echoed the pilot. "And she fills away—she steers to head us off! Luff there, at the helm—luff for the shore! Only shoal water can save us now. It will be the beach, I'm afraid, before we get through!"

The schooner quickly changed her course and flew toward the land, leaving the breakers on her quarter.

"Look there, captain—look there!" shouted the pilot, pointing aft.

Sadie Ridgewood and Melisse Duprét had been left unguarded in the excitement, and both were on deck wildly waving their scarfs toward the man-of-war. Undoubtedly they were seen.

"Carry them below! Lock them in their state-room, and if they leave it again they die!" shouted Spirifort.

A half-dozen men rushed upon the girls. Two received each a fearful gash from the knives the girls had drawn, for, mad as the act was, they resisted those who rushed upon them.

"Down with them, but harm them not; their punishment will come!" shrieked Spirifort, who saw the act.

Overpowered, bound and helpless, they were dragged below just as a shot came shrieking through the air, falling just astern of the schooner. The sloop-of-war had opened fire.

"Up with the staysail and flying-jib!" shouted the pirate chief. "Set the gaff-top-sail. If we lose a spar, we are gone! Work, men—work!"

The increased sail gave more speed; the schooner held her own—began to gain.

But another shot fell so close it dashed the spray over her after deck.

"Bang away, curse you, bang away!" cried the pirate, as he shook the only hand he could use at the enemy. "If I had the Diablocito here, I'd give you gun for gun, and all you wanted of it!"

A race was now begun in earnest. Had the captain of the oysterman known the coast below the capes as he did above, the result would not have been long in abeyance.

But the sailing-master and captain of the sloop-of-war now had to run by the chart, and it marked many a shoal between them and Hatteras, now not far away.

Yet, after those struggling women had been seen on the schooner's deck, the naval captain, with all the chivalry of his service, drove his vessel on, at every risk, to close with the pirates.

Firing as fast as he could from his bow chaser on that side, he stood on, while the schooner, heading for the inside channel off Hatteras, drove forward in desperate haste.

Twice he had seen shot strike the vessel, but no vital spar or rope or sail was cut.

The sailing-master was aloft in the fore-cross-trees to look out for shoals; two leadsmen on either side got soundings when they could.

"Sink her, cap'n—sink her!" cried the old oysterman. "I'd rather see her go out of sight under water, though she is all I own in the world, than let those bloody wretches get away!"

"She is ours! She is ours!" cried the captain of the sloop-of-war, rubbing his hands in glee, as he saw a round shot tear a hole through the mainsail. Tell the gunner to send a double-headed shot in the next charge. "We'll cut every spar out of her!"

A couple of minutes later and the new charge cut away her foretopmast.

All this time both vessels had rushed at their highest speed down the coast.

"Try another double-header forward there!" came from the captain.

The shot went shrieking through the air, and away went the schooner's mainmast, close to the deck!

"Steady now, steady! If she don't surrender we'll cut her down to the water's edge!" cried the naval captain.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DIABOLICAL CUNNING.

MADLY the pirates were seen cutting away the wrecked mast and trying to stay up the tottering foremast. They seemed ready to sink without a thought of surrender, for her course was held by the schooner without a change.

But now the sloop-of-war was gaining hand over hand.

"Cease firing! She is ours, and we will not cut her all up!" cried the captain of the sloop-of-war.

Suddenly the sailing-master from aloft, who had watched the schooner when he should have been looking ahead, shouted in the wildest excitement:

"Hard down the helm! Throw all aback, or we are lost! Breakers close ahead and on both bows!"

Cool as an iceberg, the heroic captain took in the situation at a thought. Snatching the trumpet from the officer of the deck, he sprang upon the hammock-nettings and holding by the mizzen-shrouds shouted:

"Every officer and man to his station for wearing ship! Hard up the helm! Brace in the after yards and tend forward braces!"

Nobly the gallant ship answered the helm, and as she swung almost around on her heel, not going three lengths ahead, she came free of the deadly peril in front.

But other shoals were all around her; the schooner, guided by a man who knew all the coast, had literally led her into a trap, and to get her out of it required consummate seamanship! Sail had to be shortened, tack after tack made, and even then, in spite of care, the good ship struck twice on a sunken reef with a force that almost jumped the masts out of her.

But she drove off and went clear, and finally headed into deeper and clear water.

The carpenter and his mates were sent to sound the pumps. Quickly it was found that she was leaking rapidly. The pumps were manned fore and aft, and the carpenters sent below to do all they could to find the leaks and check the inflow of water.

And in all this rapid struggle to save the ship and crew, neither officer nor man had given a thought to the half-crippled pirate.

A look for the schooner brought bitter words to the captain's lips. She was now out of gunshot, going off free under her foresail and running in close to Hatteras, where he dared not follow, even had his ship been all right.

For the ship under his command and the lives of the gallant men on board were his to save, not to sacrifice.

Further examination as to casualties showed the foremast badly sprung, for she had all her canvas on when she struck the reef.

There was but one thing for a good officer to do. The ship, under sail that would not strain her masts, must be got into the nearest port where she could be docked and repaired. That port was Norfolk. With a heavy heart the captain gave the order to steer for that port.

He had been so sure of those pirates, so sure of the rescue of those distressed women. It was cruel, hard to be so disappointed.

It was near night when the crippled sloop-of-war headed in for Hampton Roads. While yet it was light enough to see, a man-of-war schooner that had been seen coming down under all sail with a spanking breeze from the north, rounded in as if to speak her.

Her signal number flew at the fore—it denoted the Shark. The stars and stripes at the peak told her nationality.

Ranging up on the lee quarter of the sloop-of-war, she hailed:

"You seem in distress, sir! What is the matter?"

"We got aground while chasing a pirate. I'll heave to—come on board and learn particulars, so you can renew the chase!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

With bounding hearts the lieutenant commanding the Shark, accompanied by his pilot, hurried to board the sloop-of-war, and hear the news.

It was soon told! How the soul of young Ridgewood exulted when he learned enough to satisfy him that his sister and Melisse Duprét were yet alive and on board the smaller vessel of which they now heard for the first time.

"The Diablocito is on the coast and not far away!" he said. "If we can run to the south of Hatteras to-night, we will be almost sure to overhaul the crippled oyster boat in the morning."

"That is our course, and we will try it!" said Lieutenant Chandler.

The captain of the captured oyster boat begged leave to go in the Shark, that being able to recognize his boat he might aid yet in her recapture.

Before rowing back to the Shark, a report was sent by the sloop-of-war, to be mailed to the captain of the station at New York, and Ridgewood wrote to his mother.

Then Mr. Chandler filled away and stood down the coast, careful to avoid the dangers, which had so nearly wrecked the other ship.

The officers and crew of the splendid schooner were all elated with the news received, and hoped soon to find themselves in contact, not with the oyster boat and her scanty crew of wretches alone, but with the Diablocito herself and her band of blood-stained villains.

As for young Ridgewood, the hope of his life lay in getting alongside that smaller schooner and rescuing his loved ones, while he punished the arch fiend of all, Spirifort, whom he knew to be there, if he had not rejoined the larger vessel before being overtaken.

After long and earnest consultation between the commander of the Shark and his pilot, it was decided to run well to the southward of Hatteras, near which the crippled oyster schooner had last been seen, and lay till it was light enough to make things visible on the land and water, and then heading northward, there was a chance to intercept her. With only a foremast standing, she could not go very far south in one afternoon and night, nor could she very easily work into any of the narrow inlets along the coast.

So pressing on sail and standing out far enough to clear the dangerous shoals of Hatteras, the Shark was again headed south.

During her run from New York her crew had been exercised at the great guns and with small-arms twice a day, and all being picked veterans in service, they were found proficient in all their duties, fully ready for the hazardous work expected of them.

Neither Ridgewood or the young lieutenant in command turned in that night. Sleep with them was out of the question. Ridgewood was too anxious—the lieutenant held his first command, and his heart was full with the importance of his mission and the belief that very soon he would carry his vessel into action.

Before dawn, by the dead reckoning of their run, they were considerably south of the Okrakoke Inlet—further than it seemed possible the crippled schooner could have reached.

Sail was reduced, and just before light taken entirely in, so that those on board could see without their white sails being conspicuous.

Fore and aft, aloft and below, with every spy-glass on board in use, anxious eyes scanned the expanse of land and water when the rising sun threw its rays far and wide.

Two vessels were in sight. One a great square-rigged vessel far out in the Gulf Stream, heading north—evidently a merchantman.

The other—just coming out of Okrakoke, a schooner, and of a build and rig which almost smelled of turpentine. Nothing more.

As the schooner headed out to sea, as if to reach the Gulf Stream and get its aid to carry her north, sail was made on the Shark to intercept her and learn if she had seen or heard of any suspicious craft inside on the Sound.

A run of seven or eight miles placed the Shark

close to the strange schooner, and, shortening sail, Lieutenant Chandler hailed her:

"Schooner ahoy! What name, and where bound?"

"The Jerushy Small, Captaining Small, for Kennebunkport, down East—got pitch, tar and turpentine below and on deck. Who be ye?"

"The United States schooner Shark, Lieutenant Chandler in command. Report us when you get in!"

"Startlingly! Anything more?"

"Yes. Have you seen a schooner with mainmast gone, running under foresail only, on the coast or in the Sound?"

"No—haven't seen no sich!"

"Or any suspicious-looking vessel—large as this, rakish, low in the water, and armed?"

"Jerusalem, no! Be there pirates abroad, and you lookin' for 'em?" cried the alarmed skipper.

"Yes—keep your eyes skinned and carry sail on your drogher!" cried the lieutenant, laughing at the sudden trepidation of the Down-Easter.

"We can make nothing out of him—fillaway!" he added.

And the schooner went ahead of the turpentine as if the latter was at anchor, when her head yards were braced up, and her sheets flattened in.

"Say!" shouted Captain Small, before they were out of hearing, "can't you keep by a feller an' perfect him till he gits out o' danger?"

The Shark was too far ahead by this time for an answer to reach the ears of Captain Small, for she was going up the coast at a ten or eleven knot rate.

When four or five is run by a turpentine drogher, she is doing well for the trade.

"Mast-head, there!" shouted Ridgewood, the pilot.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Can you see over the sand-hills into the Sound, plainly?"

"Yes, sir—between the patches of timber I can see clear water all along!"

"Can you see any vessels—under sail or at anchor?"

"No, sir—not now. I thought a bit ago, away to the northward, I saw something like a sail, but it was gone so quick I thought I'd mistook a gull or something in the air for it and didn't report."

"Report the instant you see anything even like a sail, in any direction, inshore or at sea!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

A keen-eyed midshipman, on his last cruise before examination, was now sent aloft with a spy-glass and directed to keep a special watch on the Sound, while the Shark sailed up the coast as close in as the lead would allow them to go.

The crew were now piped to breakfast, and the officers took their morning meal. The episode with the "Jerushy Small" had belated them a little.

Over their coffee Chandler and Ridgewood discussed the feasibility of sending boats inside to try discoveries there.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FLIGHT.

Good blood tells! Especially when it is called upon! This applies to men and horses. Why not to women as well?

When the cannon-shot from the sloop-of-war first shrieked out the shrill warning of danger, as it sped through the air close to the flying oyster boat, Sadie Ridgewood and Melisse Duprét rejoiced to hear it. When a shot crashed through the low bulwarks of the schooner almost over their heads they did not tremble. They had but one fear. It was that the pirates might escape, even under that scathing fire.

When they heard the rent canvas and the curses of the pirates as sails were weakened, the girls prayed that worse might come, and they almost shrieked for joy when they heard the mainmast come crashing down overhead.

They could see the sloop-of-war from the cabin windows, for all the guards had gone on deck again and left the cabin free to them. The noble ship seemed one sheet of sail from the trucks down, and they thought she must soon be alongside and that their rescue was assured.

But in an instant all was changed. The ship was among breakers, or so it looked to them, for they saw the foaming surges rise high between them and the ship. And their hearts sunk when they saw her all in confusion and turning short away from the chase.

Then the cheers of the pirate fiends above told them that hope was gone, and they wept bitterly when the schooner, crippled as she was, passed safely on, leaving the great ship behind.

Disarmed—at the mercy of wretches whom it would be vile slander to call men—it is wonderful that they did not sink in despair.

But after the first paroxysm of grief was over, they nerved themselves up, and retiring to their state-room, closed the door and prayed to the Almighty for help, for in Him alone had they hope.

They heard the feet of the pirates overhead as the latter worked to repair damages, and knew by the sound of dashing waves that they still sailed on.

They were conscious by the sound that the vessel passed over high, rolling waves, just as darkness was near, and they could hear surf beating on the shore on either side. Thus they knew they were near land. In a short time the vessel seemed to be in smooth water, and they heard the anchor splash as it went down from the bow.

Spirifort came down into the cabin now, and opening their state-room door looked in. He held a lamp in his well hand, and its light fell on their pale but resolute faces as well as on his own scarred and sardonic countenance.

"So, my lady-birds! You are unhurt, after our sharp bombardment. I have been too busy hitherto to look to your especial comfort—but soon you will be in roomy quarters on board the Diablocito, where, if you behave well, you may stand a chance to be happy!"

"Happy in the presence of murderers? Would angels rejoice in hell?" cried Sadie Ridgewood, bitterly, bravely, her eyes flashing defiance as she spoke.

"Ay—fallen ones, my dear!" sneered the pirate. "Your supper will be ready soon, and then, when we have found the hiding-place of my own warlike craft, you will have a change of quarters."

Turning, he set the lamp on the cabin table and again limped on deck.

"We are where they do not fear to show lights," said Sadie.

Then, going out into the main cabin with her companion, she looked through the little cabin windows.

All she could see was a wide expanse of water, and dimly, to the right, a low shore with some small trees upon it. Not a house or light or any other vessel could she see.

"It is but a little way to the shore. Can you swim, Melisse?" she asked.

"Oh yes—I often bathe in the surf in the warm summer-time, and there I learned to swim strongly and well, aided by my father and uncle!"

"I, too, learned when bathing on the sea-side!" said Sadie. "If we could only elude our guards and drop overboard, we could reach the shore. It is not two hundred yards away."

"We will try if the slightest opportunity occurs!" said Melisse. "These windows are so small we could not get through them!"

"No—but all the men except Spirifort have been up and awake these two nights. They must be nearly worn down. If they sleep—we can pass them unseen and then—once in the water we will reach the shore and hide or—die before we let them recapture us!"

"Spirifort may watch us!"

"Let him. If the rest sleep I would strangle the murderer with my own hands and bless God for a chance to do the deed!"

"Oh, Sadie—you are more brave than I! But I will help you all I can and die by your side if need be. Anything—everything but life purchased at the price of honor!"

The girls embraced. They were united in one thought. They could die, and die together, but they would not submit to further wrong.

"Sadie—dearest, there is a medicine-chest in the pantry. I saw it when we got our knives. If we could find morphia and put some in the bottle of brandy which the pirate drinks from every time he comes into the cabin, would it not help us?"

"Melisse—you are a blessed angel! It will be just the thing—better far than to risk an attack upon him, weak as we are!"

Quickly the search was made, the soporific powder found and the whole—an ounce at least—put in the large decanter of liquor—enough to put him to sleep if taken in small doses, to kill him if used largely.

Then the girls hastened to their room to await events.

When supper was laid on the table, they ate only hard-bread and drank water—two things which could not well be drugged without detection.

It was not long before Spirifort came down with his pilot. Both men then partook freely of the drink and did not detect the drug. They ate heartily also and talked of their plans coolly.

"It is too dark to-night for us to try find the lagoon where the big schooner lays with this craft, for I can't steer by compass and the Sound is full of shoals!" said the river pirate. "But I can take a boat and go near the place and by a signal he'll know and answer, Scar-faced Jim can learn where we are and then we'll run in when day breaks!"

"The plan is good. I'd go with you, but these girls are too sharp to be left under any guard but my own. Take what men you want in the boat and go!"

"All right. I'll take four men, the boat rows that many oars!"

"How long will you be gone?"

"Not more than an hour or two, if I find 'em easy, Cap!"

"All right—be off as soon as you like. Tell 'em on deck that I'll keep watch down here, and they can all turn in—them that do not go with you, I mean!"

The pilot went on deck, and soon the boat was heard pushing off.

Satisfied, Spirifort took another pull at the brandy bottle and then glanced in upon the girls!

They had laid down and appeared to be asleep. The pirate smiled grimly.

"They'll never die of grief!" he said, and he went to the cushioned transom and sat down.

"How drowsy I feel—I must take another drink to keep awake on!" he muttered.

And he suited his action to his words.

The last dose fixed him. He staggered toward his former seat and fell at full length on the cabin floor.

"Now is our time, or never!" whispered Sadie, seeing that he made no attempt to stir. "If he has taken enough to kill him all the better!"

"I will secure one weapon at least!" said Melisse, as she bent down and took a golden-hilted dagger from the pirate's belt and placed it in the bosom of her dress.

"We must change our clothes—we can never swim in our dresses!" said Sadie.

Hunting through the cabin they came upon an old brass-bound trunk and, on opening it, found two or three suits of common sailors' clothing.

Quickly discarding the outer portion of their own garments, they each donned a sailor's shirt and pants, and then they were ready for their venture.

Creeping stealthily up the cabin stairs they reached the deck. They listened, but heard no sound. The men who had been left had gone down into the fore-castle to sleep.

"I wish we knew how the tide ran—no matter, it is but a little way to the shore. Come, Melisse—come, side by side we escape or side by side we die!"

Carefully the two girls in their sailor garb lowered themselves over the low side of the schooner into the water. Hearing no sound of alarm, they let all go, and swimming slowly, but steadily, moved toward the sandy beach.

They could see dimly between them and the eastern sky some stunted pines, and when at last they stood tired and trembling on the sand they could hear the roar of the ocean surf outside, and they feared they were on an island instead of the mainland and that perhaps it was uninhabited.

"No matter—we must move on and get as far from here as we can, for they will pursue us the moment our absence is discovered," said Sadie.

"It will warm our chilled forms to move on and as fast, too, as we can go," added Melisse.

They hurried through the little grove of pines and then saw far away to the north, or it seemed far in the darkness, the flashing lenses of the Hatteras light-house.

"There—there is our hope. If we can only reach that light; it is a Government station, and we will be protected," cried Sadie.

And they pressed forward through the loose, deep sand, now tumbling over hillocks that had been raised by the wind, then falling in some unseen depression, for it was only starlight, and that much dimmed by clouds flying overhead.

But, for the time they were happy in spite of their fears—they were free; free from their horrible and murderous captor.

Faint—terrified at every sound, not daring to stop for a moment's rest, on—they pushed.

"Oh, how far it is! Can we live to get there?" murmured Melisse.

"We must live to get there, or die in the effort. Death is better than to be retaken by the foul wretch whom we have escaped. If we are pursued, kill me with the dagger you carry and slay yourself, rather than submit to recapture!"

Sadie spoke bravely, and she meant every word she uttered.

On—on—panting for breath—on, trembling in every limb, on, trying each to hold up the other, they staggered, until the light seemed almost overhead and the roar of the ocean surf grew louder and louder.

On, until they were in front of a plain house, whitewashed, so they saw it plainly, even in the dark. They knew it was almost morning, for a large star rising in the eastern horizon told them as much.

Almost falling against the closed door, Sadie struck it hard with her hand.

No answer came. If inmates were there, no such feeble blow would arouse them.

Melisse took the dagger from her bosom and with its heavy hilt struck several resounding blows upon the panels.

"Is that you Barney? If you're done wid the light for the night, why the devil don't you come in an' not stand a-thumpin' the dure wid yer big pertatie-mashers?"

It was a woman's voice they heard, and she seemed in a querulous humor, from her sharp tones.

"It is two poor girls who seek shelter!" cried Sadie. "Let us enter, please."

"Gurrls! Gurrls here on Hatteras! Is there a wreck?" screamed the same voice, and they heard sounds inside as if the woman was rising and saw a light gleaming through a crack in the door.

The door was thrown open a minute later, and a tall, red-faced woman, with a lamp in her hand, glared out upon them. Her night-cap

and scanty garments indicated that she was just out of bed.

"Is it *gurrils* ye call yerselves? *GURRLS* wid *b'yes'* clothes on—wet, too, as *drowned* rats! Where's yer wreck—where is it, I say, and is the stuff comin' ashore?"

"We have not been wrecked—we escaped from pirates, got men's clothes and swam on shore—oh, take us in and give us shelter!"

"*Pirates?* The devils! I must call Barney! He's wid the light!"

And the woman, setting her lamp down, ran as hard as she could for the light-house a few yards away.

CHAPTER XXXV.

PURSUIT.

WHEN the boat steered by the river pirate, who acted as pilot on the oysterschooner, shoved off, she headed up the Sound, and her helmsman took the bearings of the light to shape her course with. That could be seen distinctly on his star-board or right hand. His course was westerly toward the mainland not far distant. For a little while he spoke occasionally to the men, and then he seemed to grow strangely drowsy, and by the time they were well over on the other shore he dropped over in the stern of the boat, sound asleep and snoring.

As he had not told the men how to steer, or how to find their destination, and his first course was lost by his yawing around, the crew were thrown into a quandary.

They tried to arouse him in vain, though they shook him roughly, dashed water in his face, and tried every other means they could think of.

"He has been drinking hard. We'll have to wait till he sobers up!" said one of the men.

"And that might take all night!" said another.

"A night drifting about like fools in a cold wind without a bite to eat or a sup o' drink!" growled a third.

"Cussed if I'll stand it. He is not one of us, no way!" snarled one of the oldest pirates in the band. "Let us take him back and report to the captain himself for orders!"

The last plan was agreed upon by the boat's crew, and within an hour from the time they left the schooner they were on her deck again.

"They keep a blamed nice lookout here!" cried the old pirate, when they got on board without being hailed. "One man could run off with the schooner before anybody woke!"

Some of the men from the fore-castle came out drowsy and careless when they heard their comrades on deck, and to the query, "Where's the captain?" answered that he was on watch in the cabin, and had sent them word that they could turn in.

Down into the cabin went the oldest and shrewdest pirate in the crowd, expecting to find the captain also asleep. He was not disappointed. So sound, too, that at first he thought he was dead.

But he breathed heavily and groaned when shook; but could not be aroused from his stupor.

"There's witchery in all this! I never knew the captain so drunk he was not fit for duty, to fight for his life if 'twas needed!" muttered the man.

Then his eyes fell on female garments scattered over the floor of the cabin; and the open chest of sea-clothing.

Quickly he sprang to the state-room where the young ladies had been confined. It was empty.

"On deck, there! The captain has been drugged, and the women prisoners are gone. They've jumped overboard to drown, or have got ashore some way!"

His cry brought every man below, and at a glance they saw that what he had said was truth. The girls were not there. But their dresses, not torn or disordered, but laying just as they had left them in their haste, were on the floor and berth in their state-room. And portions of seamen's clothing that they had discarded, lay tossed about in front of the old trunk in which more of the same sort remained.

"Mates! The cap'n will go wild when he wakes and finds 'em gone! He'll murder every man aboard—see if he don't!" cried the man who made the discovery.

"We'll hide his weapons till he gets over his fury!" said another. "It is no fault of ours, anyway. We were off obeying his orders, and he took the watch here on himself!"

By this time, after repeated efforts, the pilot was brought back to wakefulness. At first he was very stupid, but the news of the discovery of the escape of the girls aroused him quicker than all else.

And the first thing he did was to take the most urgent measures to get Spirifort aroused. He caused large doses of salt water to be poured down his throat, almost strangling him in the treatment.

After a long time violent retching occurred, which almost killed the patient, while it gave him so much pain where he was wounded that he quivered in agony—but it brought him partially out of his stupor—fortunately for those under him, not *fully*, or he would have found weapons and vented his fury before he had time to think or reason.

When at last—very sick, he asked for brandy, the man who went to get it, pronounced it drugged strongly with opium, and he was given strong coffee instead.

This aroused him, and he began to realize the situation. For a wonder, he seemed to take the escape of his prisoners coolly.

"They cannot have got far away!" he said.

"Has the vessel been searched?"

"Yes—fore and aft, aloft, on deck, and below!" was the answer.

"The only boat we have was absent. They have either drowned themselves or escaped on some of our broken spars!"

The thought of a woman being a strong swimmer never entered his mind.

"Take lanterns in the boat, land and look all along the shore for tracks!" he cried. "Their feet are small, they can be traced if they have reached the land!"

A half-dozen men hurried to obey the order. They rowed to the shore and scattered all along the shelving beach, lights in hand.

Soon a shout of triumph was heard, and the boat came dashing back. The river pirate, or pilot was the first to speak.

"They have landed—the tracks of their small feet are plain in the sand. They have hurried away north toward the light-house!"

"Then they cannot escape. They must be followed at once and by every man on board!" cried Spirifort. "You, pilot, will head the shore party to follow the tracks with lights. Take half of our men—the strongest of them—and push on till you overtake the fugitives. You *will* get them, you must not fail. But they will be worn out and you tired. I will take the boat with the other men and row up the beach so as to take you all on board when you have the girls safe. Do you understand?"

"Yes!"

"Then into the boat at once—the schooner can take care of herself until we get back. They have been gone for hours; you must hurry. If they are at the light-house seize them, and if the keeper tries to stop you, put out *his* light in a hurry!"

His orders were too sharp and stern for them to hesitate a second. Each man sprang for his arms and then took his place in the boat.

The captain now missed his dagger.

"Look out when you close with the she-tigers!" he said. "My dagger has been taken from my belt, and one of them must have it. You have seen them use knives before. But remember—no violence beyond enough to take and hold them safe. When they are found—shout! We will answer from the boat!"

By this time the land-party were on shore, and as they moved forward, trailing the steps of the poor fugitives, the boat was rowed slowly up along the beach, keeping as far as possible within sight of the lights that went bobbing up and down over the sand-hills.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A VIRAGO.

WHEN the woman ran in her scanty night-robes to the light-house, the poor girls, ready to drop from sheer weakness, tottered into the house and sat down on a rough wooden bench near the door.

The house was coarsely but comfortably furnished, and seemed to have three rooms, all on the ground floor, with a little loft overhead reached by a ladder. One room had a bed in it, which, from its tumbled appearance, had just been deserted by the female who had exhibited such scant hospitality.

Full ten minutes went by before the woman came back.

"There they are, and it's a purty story they tell!" cried the woman, pointing to the girls, and addressing a short, thick-set man with but one arm, the empty sleeve on his right side telling that the other was gone. "Here's my *Barney*, and he's my lawful ould man, mind *that* now," she continued, now addressing the girls. "Tell him the cock-and-bull story ye told me an' see if he'll believe it, for I don't!"

"Whatever ye say, sp'ake the truth and shame the devil!" said the man, in a kinder tone than the woman used. "I'm an ould sojer as have fought wid Gin'ral Jackson an' lost me arm wid a bullet through the elbow, and I'm not easy deceived!"

"But you're a bould desaver, Barney Buglin, or I wouldn't be wastin' the flower of me life in these desert sands! But go on, *gurrils*—tell me ould man yer story! But I've off the *pirate* part, for I don't believe a word of it!"

"Can you not give us a little water? We are almost dying with thirst!" gasped Melisse.

"*Wather*—when we've whisky to the fore? Sure the water is so salty it's not fit for the drinkin'!" said Barney, looking at the girl's pale face with pity, and getting a black bottle down from a cupboard and setting it beside a water-pail which had a dipper in it.

Both girls drank eagerly of the water but declined the whisky, and then Sadie said:

"We spoke truly when we said we had escaped from the power of a murderous pirate and his crew. When a part of his crew were absent and the rest sleeping, we found morphia and put it in the liquor he drank and—"

"D'ye hear that, Barney? Put that bottle back, d'ye mind. Ye may get p'izened before ye know it!" cried the woman.

"Hush now, Colleen—hush, I say. an' let the lady sp'ake!"

"The *lady* in *b'ye's* clothes. Look till *that*, will ye? Or are ye gettin' blinded wid their beauty, ye one-armed b'aste of the wurruld?"

"K'ape your tongue still, woman, or ye'll get what Paddy gave the drum! Now go on, miss, I'm a-listenin'!"

"I said that we put a sleeping potion in the bottle of liquor the pirate drank from, and when he fell asleep we changed our garments for this coarse clothing and swam on shore. Then we ran or walked all the way here, for we saw the light and thought we'd get help!"

"Divilish little can I help you, if *pirates* come afther you. I've but one arm, and all the gun I have is an ould musket wid a broken lock that wouldn't go off if it had a load in, which it hasn't. If my ould woman has a mind to hide ye, she may, but—"

"Barney Buglin—am I such an ould goose as to hide away purty *gurrils* in *b'ye's* clothes for you to be peekin' afther? It's not *me* that'll do it. So the sooner they're off out o' here the better for 'em and for you too if you care for what hair I've left ye!"

"You hear!" said Barney to the girls, ruefully. "I'm boss over in the light-house, but she is boss here!"

"Then let us go to the light-house—away to its very top!" cried Melisse. "If we are pursued there, we can die—that's all!"

"Hear till that, will ye?" yelled the woman, thoroughly angry. "Ye'd go into the light-house wid *him*, would ye? I've a mind to scratch yer brazen eyes out. Git away from me house, wid yer *b'ye's* clothes on! Begone I tell ye, or I'll h'ate the kittle an' scald ye! Go—I say!"

And she threatened the poor girls so furiously that they shrunk out of the house, weeping and asking if there were no other house near where they could find shelter.

"If you could paddle a canoe, or set up a sail and steer it, there's one over on the Sound by a little landin'. And if you'll steer off wid the risin' sun at yer right shoulder for ten miles, ye'll come to a bit of an island, where there's a fisherman lives wid his darters. His ould woman is dead, praise the Lord, and you may fare better than wid us. It'll soon be light and the landin' is down by yon big tree—you can't miss it. I'll loan you the canoe if you'll send it back!"

The girls knew they could not stay there and they started for the landing, weak and exhausted though they were.

Guided by the tree the light-house-keeper had pointed out, and fearful that they might be tracked from the schooner, the girls put forth every energy.

It was just in the gray of morning when they reached the landing. A cry of delight broke from the lips of Melisse. A long sharp canoe, hollowed from a cypress log lay in the water. It had paddles and a mast with a lug sail on.

"I have been used to canoes on our bay in Labrador and can both paddle and sail them!" she cried.

"Then for Heaven's sake let us get in and be off. Look back at the light-house!" said Sadie, hoarsely.

One glance back told Melisse how fortunate they were in having been driven from there.

There were men running to and fro about the place and one whom they recognized as the pilot of the schooner by a large white slouch hat he wore was seen rushing into the light-house.

In a second both girls were in the canoe. Melisse seized a paddle and swiftly propelled it up the beach a little ways until it was behind a small clump of dwarfish pine trees.

Here she paused and bidding Sadie sit very steady, she raised the slender mast, which stepped through a thwart well toward the bow. Then she hoisted the lug-sail and with the sheet in her hands stepped aft to where her steering-paddle lay.

Handling Sadie the sheet—or rope which held the leech of the sail in place, she directed her not to let go except when told to, and wind it over a thole-pin near her, to ease the strain on it when she filled away.

Looking east, she saw by the roseate hue of the clouds where the sun was about to rise, and heading the canoe in a course which would leave the sun on her right, she pushed boldly out where the wind would catch her sail.

And she saw she had no time to lose, for running at full speed from the direction of the light-house she saw the party of men seen there before, and at their head came the pilot in his broad-rimmed hat.

"Heaven be praised for this escape!" cried Sadie. "I hated that woman for her cruelty, now I bless the temper which drove us away. Jealousy has done many a wrong, but in this case it has been our salvation!"

"Yes—and we are funny-looking figures, dressed as we are, to excite jealousy!" cried Melisse, laughing in spite of their serious situation.

A shout—or rather a demoniac yell which

seemed to come over the water astern of them—made Sadie look back.

"Horror!" she screamed. "There is that wretch, Spirifort, in a boat full of men in hot pursuit of us!"

In her terror she let go of the sheet, and the sail flapped idly against the mast.

"Are you mad?—you have let our only chance of escape slip from your hand!" cried Melisse.

But—bold and skillful on the water, she sprung forward, caught the rope and drew the sail back again where it could fill with the freshening wind. But they had lost so much that Spirifort was within a few boats' lengths of them, and his triumphant order for them to stop told that he was sure of his prey.

But just at that moment the pilot reached the shore. In a loud, ringing shout he called out:

"Captain, stop and take us aboard, or we're all lost. There is a man-of-war outside the inlet where we came in, and she has boats down that are aboard the schooner by this time. I saw her from the light-house!"

"Curse you, I'll have you yet!" yelled Spirifort to the girls, shaking his drawn sword in wrath.

But he turned his boat to the shore to take in his men.

And now feeling the wind, the light canoe shot swiftly up the Sound, for Spirifort resumed his chase, or seemed to, the moment his men got on board.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHERE ARE THEY?

THE reader may have supposed, in deep sympathy with our persecuted heroines, or hoped, that the war-vessel seen off Hatteras Inlet at that early hour by the river pirate who had acted as pilot to the captured oyster schooner, was the Shark, and that Ridgewood was thus close upon the track of his sister and his betrothed.

But a moment of reflection will tell him that the Shark, swift as she was, could not have been there, for at dawn she was off Okracoke, far down the coast.

The vessel seen from the light-house by the alarmed pilot was the revenue-cutter which had been sent from Baltimore in pursuit of the murderous gang. She had spoken the sloop-of-war, an hour or more after the Shark had filled away and learned all about the chase and escape of the pirates, with the loss of their mainmast and other injuries. And she had started down the coast, with great advantages over the Shark.

Her commander—Napoleon B. Coste*—was himself the best coast-pilot in the revenue service. He knew every port and inlet from Canada to the Mexican line and could enter or depart by night as well as day any harbor having water enough on its bar for his cutter, the Campbell.

Captain Coste was known as the smugglers' terror on every station to which he was sent.

Thus, instead of being forced to go around the dreaded shoals of Hatteras, he held his course inside under shortened sail, carefully threading the narrow and intricate passage made before by the fugitive schooner. By dawn he lay, hove to, off of Hatteras Inlet, but the tide was at ebb and the water too low for him to attempt to carry the cutter in.

Therefore, when the lookout from aloft got sight over the land of the crippled schooner, he ordered out four boats with well-armed crews and sent them in to capture her. She had been described so well, and was so plainly marked by the damage of the day before, that she was known as soon as sighted.

The boats dashed bravely in over the bar and made at once for the schooner, expecting, of course, a sharp resistance. Divided, so as to strike her bow and stern and board, they swept forward and soon were alongside—not a shot fired or a man seen on board, or even a boat in view.

"She has been deserted!" said the lieutenant who commanded the boat's party. He looked her all over, even into the room where the poor girls had been confined, and ordering that nothing should be touched or disturbed until his captain saw it, sent one boat off to the cutter to report, and with the other three determined to tow the recaptured schooner out over the bar to an anchor there, where she could be refitted and sent in as a prize.

It took some time to weigh her anchor, and the wind having shifted as well as the tide, it was slow work getting her out. But at last it was accomplished and she was taken to an anchorage near the cutter, from which a spare topmast was procured to use as a jury mainmast—or a temporary mast to aid in sailing her.

Captain Coste came on board and closely examined the vessel. According to his judgment she had been deserted hours before, since there was no fire in her galley, no cooked food visible, and everything left in disorder.

"The pirates have boarded their large vessel and let the schooner go, since she has served their purpose."

* A real character, and noted for all the qualities described.

"And that large vessel—where do you suppose she is?" asked his first lieutenant.

"Gone to sea! Why, do you think she'd lay here to be caught in a trap? Pirates are not fools, if they are robbers and murderers!"

"Sail ho!" shouted the lookout on the cutter's fore cross-trees.

"Whereaway, and what does she look like?" responded Captain Coste, springing into his boat and ordering it alongside the cutter, which lay hove to not a pistol-shot to leeward.

"She is close in with the land, sir! Square-rigged—no, sir—she steers off to clear a shoal, I reckon, and is—a foretopsail schooner—very large and heavy-rigged, sir."

"By the holy pipers! she may be the pirate herself! Call all hands to quarters and clear for action!" shouted the captain, as he sprung on the deck of his cutter.

Taking his glass, while officers and men hurried to their stations, he went aloft far enough to get a good look at the stranger.

"Armed—terribly heavy sparred, sharp-painted black from stem to stern, it must be her!" he cried, as he hastened back to the quarter-deck.

"Open the magazine, double-shot the broad-side guns and put a chain shot in the long tom there forward! Get up the pistols and cutlasses—the muskets, too—load, and be ready for work, every man!"

His orders were given sharp and clear, and in a brief period everything was ready for battle.

The men who had been at work on the captured schooner were recalled, and the latter left at her new anchorage with only one man as an anchor-watch on board.

For Captain Coste, fully believing that it was the pirate approaching, knew he would need every man at his guns, for there would be no child's play when fire was opened.

And—on board the Shark, for it was that vessel coming up the coast so fast, there was excitement, though stern naval discipline kept it down, for the two vessels had been sighted, and the old oysterman had recognized his own schooner, with one mast gone, through his telescope, from aloft.

What schooner but the pirate would be in there alongside the disabled craft.

Thus thinking, Lieutenant Chandler had cleared for action, and was far better prepared for hard and desperate fighting than the cutter, since she carried nearly double the battery and half as many more men.

Swiftly she sped up the coast, every sail aloft that would draw, her officers and men cool and elate, only anxious to meet the miscreant marauder of the seas, and to punish him as he deserved.

Nearer and nearer now the cutter tacked, and stood off to get an offing to work the ship in when the trouble began.

The other schooner headed out for the same purpose, and now not three miles apart, the commanders of each vessel had a chance to see the colors of the other.

"That craft flies the revenue flag, stars with stripes up and down!" said Lieutenant Chandler. "But she can't play that ruse on me!"

"It is not the Diablocito," said young Ridgewood, with a sigh. "That craft is much larger—but the schooner is there! We will soon know what it means. Heaven grant those poor girls are safe!"

Captain Coste hardly knew whether to feel relieved, or to be angry when he saw the pennant and colors of an American war-schooner on the coming craft. He knew, had the pirate been so large, he would have stood no chance. He had a naval signal book, and when he saw the Shark's number flying at her fore, recognized the vessel, for he had seen her several times in the course of service.

Still all hands were kept at quarters ready for work, if there was any deceit until both vessels were in hail.

Then—hove to, explanations were made, and Captain Coste asked Lieutenant Chandler to come on board for consultation while the prize was inspected.

In those days naval officers were men, not uniformed dandies, and no sticklers on points of etiquette. A revenue officer was treated with as much courtesy as he would have been if he wore the foul-anchor buttons of the navy on his coat.

And Lieutenant Chandler, with Ridgewood by his side, was rowed alongside of the cutter in as brief a time as possible.

Thence, with Captain Coste, they went on board the oyster schooner.

Tears filled young Ridgewood's eyes, brave as he was, when he saw the well-remembered dresses which had been worn by his sister Sadie and Melisse Duprét.

"They have been murdered—or worse has happened, or these garments would not be here! Thank God I yet live to revenge them!"

"What shall we do? We have the empty prize, but where is the pirate himself, the vessel in which the arch fiend of all demons, SPIRIFORT, reigns as king of the buccaneers?" said Lieutenant Chandler. "What is your opinion, Captain Coste—the chief pirate was in this schooner with his two helpless captives! Where is he now?"

"In his schooner, either down the Sound to the southward, or he has slipped out to sea in the night! There is no water north of here, deep enough inside, to float a craft like his. South—he can run over a hundred miles and get to sea through inlets as deep as this!"

"He could not have got to sea without being seen by you or I since this craft got in. He must be somewhere south in the Sound!" said the commander of the Shark. "What shall we do to hunt him up and force him to close quarters?"

"You have more men than I, sir. Let the old captain of the oysterman have three or four of your men to carry her into port. Then, with my force intact and my cutter in good order for action, I will run inside the inlet on this 'flood' and make a close search all the way down to Cape Fear. You can keep outside, watch us, and be ready if we stir him up, to help us, for he is heavier than the Campbell!"

"Your plan, Captain Coste, is the best I can think of under the circumstances. We will adopt it! If he is not found by this course—we will be off to southern seas to look for him—will we not, Ridgewood?"

"Yes, sir—I have almost lost hope for the safety of those I love. Yet we can avenge them! I am ready to go anywhere you think best!"

"Then it is settled! We will take the course suggested by Captain Coste. He knows the coast better than any of us—if the pirate craft is yet inside the Sound he will hunt her out. We will keep watch and bide our time, hoping, PRAYING to meet her muzzle to muzzle on deep water."

Having said this and extended the courtesy of an invitation to come on board the Shark, the naval commander prepared to return to his vessel.

"One moment, captain—have you considered about sending the schooner in—the oysterman I mean?" cried the revenue officer.

"Oh, yes, sir—you shall have full credit for the recapture. I will send her in to Baltimore in charge of a midshipman and three men, just enough to navigate her!"

"And I will write to my mother and try to give her more hope than I feel!" said young Ridgewood.

Time was flying during all these occurrences, and it was past "high noon" when the latter went inside the Sound on top tide and the Shark filled away once more to the southward, as the tide turned.

At the same hour the oyster schooner, with a reefed mainsail on her short jury mainmast, sailed away northerly, going outside of Hatteras shoals for this time.

She not only sailed for her point of destination but bore dispatches to the Secretary of the Navy and the commanding officer of the northern station, detailing the services performed so far.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A FRIGHTENED COUPLE.

LITTLE did Sadie Ridgewood and Melisse Duprét think that while hastening from a visible danger they were flying away from their best earthly friend—the brother and lover whom both believed to be dead since he was shot down before their eyes.

They had seen their pursuers at the light-house, discovered them running toward the water-side and then saw Spirifort in his boat close upon them.

Though they heard the words of the river pirate that a man-of-war was near, they did not for an instant think that they could reach it. Their only thought and hope was to escape from their immediate and dreaded pursuer.

And as the wind carried them rapidly up the narrowing bay, past reedy islands and sandy points, their hearts beat lighter, for the slender canoe flew along under the skillful guidance of Melisse Duprét at a rate which no boat with oars only could reach.

In truth, in less than five minutes from the start the pirates were left so far behind that both girls cried out in joy:

"We are safe—they can never overtake us!"

And just then Captain Spirifort did not try to do so. The close vicinity of that man-of-war troubled him so much that for the time he almost forgot the fugitives. He feared the discovery of the hiding-place of the Diablocito and that in his absence she would be taken at a disadvantage and be poorly defended, perhaps destroyed.

Running his overloaded boat in among the reeds and bushes of an island, at a point near the light-house where he could see the oyster schooner at her anchor, yet remain concealed with his men, he caused two to swim on shore and to steal down toward the inlet to make what discoveries they could and, returning, to report when it would be safe for him to leave his place of concealment.

From his hiding-place he saw the four armed boats make their dash upon the deserted schooner and he laughed in fiendish glee when he saw their astonishment at finding no enemy—or what he fancied must be their surprise. Bitter oaths left his lips when he saw them tow the schooner off, for she had sailed so well that he meant to arm her and make her a tender to his larger craft.

His next fear was that they might visit the

light-house and thus discover the escape of the girls, for he had no fear of their tracks being seen because his own had trampled them out of sight in following them.

One thing worried him. Hours passed and the sun had passed its meridian without his absent men returning to report. If they were seen and captured—to save their own lives they might betray him. The guilty live in constant fear, whether they are in danger or not.

When at last they saw the revenue cutter, a large foretopsail schooner, come into the Sound, the river pirate who knew where the Diablocito lay cried out:

"It's all up, cap'n! They've got some hint that the big craft has hid in here somewhere, and they're going for her!"

"Curses—ten thousand curses on the girls who drugged us and kept us back, or we'd be on her deck now, ready to send those dogs to perdition!" cried Spirifort, gnashing his teeth in rage. "Can we not make a dash and get to our schooner in spite of them?"

"No, cap'n—no! There are two leagues of open water between us and the lagoon where she lies hidden by tall trees, so far inside its winding channel that even they can see nothing from on board, below or aloft. If we show ourselves outside these reeds, how far would we go without getting cold iron around our ears?"

"I would rather die than lay here idle if they do discover the lagoon you speak of!" said the chief.

"Ah—they head down the Sound! They are off the scent!" cried the pilot. "Your craft is safe, captain, and when that fellow is hull down, which he will be inside of two hours, we'll steer for her hiding-place!"

"Not till I see the men I sent out as scouts!" said Spirifort. "They may have left men or boats on watch. Perhaps they have manned and armed the oyster boat. It is tough—but *caution is a jewel* in its place. We will stay here until dark, if necessary, to wait for our men!"

"And them girls—will you let them go? They ought to be captured, if only to punish them."

"They shall be followed, when we can do it safely! I will *not* lose them. I am keen on a scent and a tiger to follow. If they even reached Baltimore, I would have them again after all the trouble they've given me!"

"That's *grit*! I like it. I'd like to have the taming of that *blonde* in my own hands!"

"Be faithful and true, pilot, and you shall!"

"Bet your life on me, Cap, and you're dead sure to win!"

Another hour passed and the two scouts which had been sent down the beach returned. By this time the cutter was almost hull down to the south.

One of the men hailed from shore:

"You can come in and take us on board! There is no one around to bother us any more!"

Gladly the captain gave the order to row in where his men could stretch their limbs, for they had been cramped up in the boat all day and were stiff as logs.

"Well—what have you seen?" the captain asked. "Why have you delayed us all day?"

"To see the last of your enemies off, sir. The oyster schooner, with a prize crew aboard, is yet in sight to the north, while a vessel larger and heavier armed than ours, of the same rig, is yet in sight at sea, going south under easy sail. She is a regular navy craft and held a long confab with the cutter that ran inside. They're on the hunt, no doubt, for us, sir—and we'd have trouble to make way with the one outside, if she tackled us."

"Did any of their crews come ashore?"

"No, sir—they seemed too busy to think of it, boats passing from one vessel to the other."

"All right. You have done your duty well. Now for our own craft, where we'll sup, and then—some of you will take a still hunt with me for the *ducks* that went up the Bay. They must be found!"

"Beg pardon, cap'n," said the river pirate—"but I've an idea we'll leave things slack if we don't give a couple of folks up at yon light-house a scare that will make them hold their tongues should any of our enemies happen over there to question them. I had no time to do it this morning. I found out the girls had been there, for we tracked them to the door, and that the woman—the light-keeper's wife—had driven them off, and just then I saw the man o'-war, and we had to run for you to give the alarm."

"Yes—I see. If it would not leave the light untended, and thus draw attention in here all the sooner, I'd order you to go up and cut both their throats. That would silence their tongues!"

"Fright will do almost as well. They are alone, and the sight of our gang nearly threw them into fits this morning!"

"I'll go up with you and see what they are made of. Men, if I find anything to eat or drink there, we'll bring you a share!"

Accompanied by the pilot, Spirifort limped up to the light-house. He had pistols in his belt, a sword by his side. The pilot was also armed.

When they approached the dwelling-house, the keeper and his wife stood in the door.

"The howly saints be wid ye, *gintlemen*!" said the woman, her courage all gone. "Barney, you b'aste make yer manners like a man! He's a bashful craythur, my Barney is, *gintlemen*, an' I hope ye'll take no offense. Will you come in an' have a sup of whisky an' a bite to ate? It's not much, but we have no better!"

"We'll take some whisky and food, for our vessel has been stolen from us by the infernal revenue men, and we'll be short till we can get to Norfolk!" said Spirifort. "They've broken up our smuggling for a time, but we'll have another craft under our feet some day, and if you are *wise* and we are lucky you'll have silk for a dress or two and your old man cloth for a Sunday suit!"

"An' ye are smugglers only, an' not pirates?"

"Smuggling is our business—we do not call it a crime. We bring some good brandy in sometimes!"

"D'ye hear that, Barney? How thim hussies lied about decint *gintlemen*. Set out yer whisky, man, while I get the bread and m'ate. D'ye hear?"

"Yis!" said Barney, pale and trembling, for he took little stock in what he had just heard.

With liquor and some cold meat and bread the two ruffians made a hearty meal.

Then throwing down a couple of pieces of gold, Spirifort said:

"Bundle up a couple of loaves, a chunk of meat, and a bottle of drink for my men at the boat. And hark ye both—I shall be back here as soon as I get another vessel, and if you have kept still tongues in your heads, told no living soul of our visit, either this morning or now, you'll find me a liberal paymaster. But if you betray us—"

"Sure, we'd niver, *niver* be so m'ane, sir!" cried the woman.

"I hope not, for we would have to cut your throats instead of handing you a purse of yellow gold!"

"Merciful saints. Barney, darlint, we'll be still—no matter who comes—how we'd look wid our throats cut!"

Spirifort said no more. The pale face of Barney, and the tremor of the woman told that his threat had struck home.

The woman put up a quantity of food—Barney added *two* bottles of whisky instead of one, and the two pirates went to the boat, where the half-famished crew were glad to see them.

"The devils! How glad I am they didn't ask which way the *gurrils* went!" muttered Barney, when they were out of hearing. "For they'd have got it of *you* if I had biled my tongue!"

"Yis—you b'aste! You're thinkin' more about them butter-milk faced *gurrils* than you are of me, yer own lawful wife. I'd ha' tould 'em all I knew an' more too, if they'd axed me!"

CHAPTER XXXIX. THE ISLAND CABIN.

We have too long lost sight of our two heroines in distress. Neither had ever seen a great deal of the world as the world goes, neither had ever been in situations of distress and genuine peril before. Therefore the dark side of human nature had been like a sealed book to them. They did not think the man who had been kind enough and honest enough to furnish them the means of escape from deadly pursuit would be treacherous enough to betray their route to those who followed.

So they sailed boldly on for some time, they thought at least two or three hours, until the bay grew very narrow and on the inside seemed to be lined with a vast, impenetrable swamp.

"Surely we have come ten miles!" said Sadie.

"It seems *more*!" sighed Melisse. "But the wind has fallen and we've gone slow since we got up near this heavy timber. Ah—I see smoke, and it rises from yonder wooded island."

"Yes—yes—it is our haven. God grant it may be safe until we can learn how to reach some place where we can send to Baltimore for help!" added Sadie. "In my haste I forgot to take my purse from the pocket in my dress, and left it where we changed!"

"And I, having my dear father ever with me to purchase what I wanted, never carried money. So we are penniless."

"Not quite while I wear this diamond ring. It is worth a thousand dollars!" said Sadie. "It shall help us through. It was mother's gift on my last birthday, but she will blame no sacrifice that restores us to her side!"

Steering directly for the island, they soon saw a rude wharf. To its spiles or posts there was a small sailboat, a rowboat, and a canoe made fast.

Back among some pines stood a small log house. Not a human being was in sight, though smoke came from a mud chimney which rose outside and at one end of the house, indicating fire and probably life inside.

Taking in the sail, Melisse paddled up alongside the sailboat and fastened the canoe to its shroud—a single stay on each side to steady and support the mast.

Then making their way up on the wharf they paused, hoping to see some one come out of the house to whom they could speak, and ask for shelter and food.

A dog—one of those little yelping curs which

are generally used for coon dogs by the poorer class South, came barking out of the log cabin door, and a second later a tall girl, barefooted, red-haired and freckled in the face made her appearance there.

She gave one glance at our queerly-dressed heroines, and without leaving her post, shouted to some one back of her.

"Sal! G'mme the gun quick! There's two bareheaded sailors a-comin' up the path, an' dad's away to Norfolk!"

And as Sadie and Melisse halted a few steps from the door, another girl as tall and no more handsome than the first, rushed out with a long, single-barreled musket in her hands.

"Please do not be alarmed—we are only girls, poor, distressed girls, who need shelter and food!" cried Sadie.

"Skeered? We're not of the skeery kind, be we, Jemima?" answered the girl with the gun in her hand—a *twin* in looks to the other.

"No, Sal. I'm not skeered a hooter! But say, if you-uns are gals, what are you doin' with trowsers on?"

"We couldn't *swim* in our own clothes, and we had to put on these to get away from bad men who carried us off from our home. Please let us go in, for we are very weak and tired. We couldn't do any hurt if we wanted to."

"I reckon *not*. Sal an' me are wild-cats when our back hair is up!" said Jemima, lowering her gun.

"Poor creetur's. They *do* look all tuckered out," said Sally. "Come in—well get you some corn-pone and fish and catnip-tea. Dad 'll have store-tea when he gits back from Norfolk. He ought to be here now—he went day afore yesterday—"

"The day afore that, Sal!"

"So 'twas!" said Jemima; "him and our Romiette—she's the *baby*—took down a lot o' coon-skins and muss-rats and dried venison to do some tradin'."

While speaking, the poor girls were ushered into the cabin by the twins and told to "*squat*," as a bench was pointed to for them to sit on.

Then, asking no questions while hastening to be hospitable, the girls got some corn bread on the table, threw a few slices of fish in a frying-pan and set it on the coals in the huge fire-place, and threw a handful of dried catnip-leaves into the tea-kettle which steamed near by.

Some sweet-potatoes drawn from the ashes where they had been roasting, added to the meal, and made to the poor, weak girls a most delicious and strengthening repast.

"Eat hearty!" the demonstrative Jemima remarked. "We've got plenty, sich as it is, and dad 'll bring more. And me and Sal and the baby will each have a new dress, if dad gets enough for his truck."

"How old is the baby?" asked Sadie.

"Cluss on to *sixteen*, and it takes as much kaliker to kiver *her*, as it does us—maybe more, 'caze she's fatter an' plumper nor we be. Doesn't work as hard as we-uns. We hunt and fish with dad when he's to hum. I'm holy death with the gun. When I put my squinters over them gun-sights, if it's b'ar, deer or coon that I'm a-peek-in' at, down comes its carkiss."

"And I'm not fur behind!" said Sally. "I've got a gun, too, single-barrel, like hers. Dad—he shoots a double-barrel, but year in and year out, we-uns kill as much as *he*!"

"Yaas—you bet! If you gals could see us when the wild geese and wild ducks come in the fall and the swans and spoonbills! Why, we don't have shucks for *our* beds now, like we used to have when we lived over by Edenton. We've got feathers—*feathers*, SEE?"

And she went to one of the bunks that lined the far side of the great single room in the cabin and lifted up the bed-tick and shook it.

"Sal an' me helped to kill and picked over four hundred geese and swans last fall, not a-countin' the ducks an' spoonbills. We're holy death when we get at it!"

"Yaas! Dad says we are worth all the boys that ever kicked! We stays about hum and minds our business and aren't off cavortin' 'round the whisky-mills. Dad's all *temperance*, he is! Mother was given to drink and it killed her. She died jist after the baby was born and we-uns had to bring her up. We're eight years older than she!"

The girls' tongues rattled on in this way until Sadie and Melisse had eaten all they wished to and drawn away from the rude, clothless table, very much refreshed.

Sally and Jemima cleared up the table, and then sat down on stools in front of our heroines.

"Now," said Jemima, "if you-uns want to, tell us all about your troubles. Dad is big-hearted, and we-uns ain't slow, and we'll help you if we kin!"

"Thank you—we will *prove* our gratitude by acts rather than words, if we ever reach our home in safety."

Then, from the hour of the attack in her mother's house up to their landing on the little island, Sadie told every particular of their terrible experience.

Neither of the listeners spoke until Sadie finished her story. Open-eyed, open-mouthed, open-eared, stricken with wonder, they sat in silence,

until she spoke of her landing and again tearfully thanked them for their kind welcome.

"Cre-a-tion!" gasped Jemima, when Sadie stopped.

"Cre-a-tion!" echoed Sally.

They could not read, and therefore had not entered into the excitement of novel-reading; hence this reality was not contrasted with any fictitious heroism.

"You-uns is clear stuff and nary a knot in it!" said Jemima, as she drew a long breath.

"Tougher than shark-meat!" said Sally. "I say, Jemima, has your gun got buckshot in it?"

"Yaas, and a ball besides. Why?"

"Caze, if them durned pirates come here arter these poor gals, they'll git warmed, that's what I mean!"

"I'm with you all the time—but I wish dad would come. Baby is tender like an' not much on the tussle. But dad—he is a team of mules an' a bull-dog under the cart when his Ebenezer is up. He don't drink or use cuss-words like some, but is a holy horror if any one stamps on his toes!"

"There's Witch-hazel a-barkin'—maybe it's dad a' the Baby!" cried the other sister, as the cur ran yelping toward the wharf.

"Or maybe the pirates!" cried Sally, springing for her gun.

Both our heroines looked for weapons—Sadie snatched a fish-spear from the wall, Melisse drew the dagger she had taken from Spirifort's belt.

Jemima, gun in hand, started for the door.

"It's dad—dad and the Baby!" she cried, as, half laughing, half crying, she turned to the girls.

She, with the rest, believed the pirates were upon them.

They all put aside their weapons and hurried out to meet the old hunter and fisherman and "the Baby," who were coming up from the wharf, at which another sailboat was now moored.

"Who've ye got here?" asked the old man, frowning as he saw strangers, *men* as he supposed, walking along in a friendly way with his daughters.

"Don't be worried, dad! Sally an' me got lonesome and sent for a couple of *fellers* to keep us comp'ny, you an' Baby was gone so long!"

And Jemima laughed, while lifting the long, blonde hair of Melisse, she added:

"Aren't they *purty*?"

The old man—a muscular giant, full six and a half feet high, looked an instant on the slender forms of the strangers, and his gray eyes softened, and his voice lost its harsh tone when he said:

"They're *gals*! Where in all creation did you find 'em?"

"They've just got away from a gang o' pirates—they come here hungry and tired, and we've kept 'em!"

"You've done *right*! But answer me one word! Be you-uns from *Baltimore*?"

This was addressed to Sadie and Melisse.

"Yes!" said the former.

"And were took from hum on a oyster boat?"

"Yes!" replied Sadie.

"And that oyster boat got shot into by a man-o'-war outside o' here?"

"Yes—had her mainmast cut away. We escaped from her this morning!"

"Cre-a-tion! Who'd ha' thunk it? Why, gals, all Norfolk is wild about ye! They're a-sendin' off every man-o'-war in port arter the pirates! And here ye be in my cabin! I hurried back for fear o' my gals here, soon as I heard of it. What do ye suppose them pirates are now?"

"I hope the men-of-war have found them!" said Sadie. "When we were flying from them in the canoe, we heard one of them shout that a man-of-war, with lots of boats down, was in the inlet!"

"Then I reckon their meat is skinned and salted down afore this. We'll go into the house—I'm hungry, an' I reckon Baby is, too, for we've used both oar an' sail, too, to get here afore you gals seen trouble!"

"We was ready for it, dad—both guns loaded with buckshot, and balls in your double-barrel!"

"I'm afeard, ready or no, a gang o' pirates would ha' made short work with you-uns if I wasn't here!" said the sturdy old man, and he went into the house with his huge hand laid lovingly on the plump shoulder of "Baby."

She would have won a prize at a "Baby Show!"

Nearly six feet high, plump enough to bring down at least two hundred pounds on the scales, with eyes blue as indigo, a skin fair as a rose-leaf, and hair of a fiery red, she was not bad-looking.

The table was hurriedly reset—some more fish fried, and the corn bread and sweet potatoes hot from the fire, put on.

Then the old man and his Baby went in to make up for lost-time. They ate with "traveling appetites," if the reader knows what they are.

By the time they were through eating the sun had got well to the westward. Sadie saw it was late, but she ventured to ask the taciturn old man a question, for he had filled his pipe and gone out of the door to a bench there to smoke.

"Can you not take us to Norfolk, or to some

place from whence we can reach Baltimore?" she said. "We will pay you any price you ask—I have no money, but here is a diamond ring for which my dear mother paid one thousand dollars. Take it and help us!"

And Sadie impulsively drew the glittering ring from her finger.

"Oh, how *purty* 'tis!" cried the Baby, looking over Sadie's shoulder as she held it up.

"You'd like to have it, wouldn't ye, *Babe*?" said the old man, as he took the gem in his hand and looked it over.

"Oh, wouldn't I! It's so *purty*!" answered the girl, her eyes flashing and her cheeks red with excitement.

"Well, gal, you may wear a nice ring some day, got by my hard earnings! But you'll not wear *this* just now. Here, miss!"

He handed the ring back to Sadie.

"Will you not help us?" asked Sadie, mournfully.

"Not for *hire*, gal—not for *HIRE*. I'm ready to risk life to get you out o' trouble. But all the *gold* you've got—and they say in Norfolk your folks is rich—wouldn't make me raise a hand for you. A good act is no good if it is *paid* for! I will help you, and so will my gals, out of our own free hearts! I *couldn't* find my way back through crooked channels tow'rs Norfolk to-night, if I was *fit* to go. Which I'm not. I'm well-nigh tuckered out, out o' hurrying back so fast to look out for my gals. I need *rest*! Then I'll be fit for work when it comes!"

"God will reward you, sir, if we cannot!"

"Maybe so, gal—*maybe* so! I've had hard luck and little help from Him! I had the best little wife in the world. She gave me her heart and hand when we were both young and strong. I had a little farm just outside o' Edenton, a good house, teams, farm tools, six niggers and some money in bank. Them two oldest gals was born—*twins*, as you see—and both on us was content. Then she took a kind o' ailing and got what they called the *malaria*, and a young college doctor I hired said she must have stimulants. Well—I got her *wine*, and I got her *brandy*, and by an' by it got down to *whisky*. The more she had, the more she wanted, and no other medicine would *do*! To make the story short, it run so six or seven years! She kept me from seeing to anything, and by and by I run fearful short o' money. Taxes was heavy, the doctor sent in a bill o' two thousand dollars, then the Baby there was born—and—and *she*, as I loved better than life with all her faults, *died*!"

The old man wept silently for a time. His pipe had gone out. He turned it upside down, emptying out fire and ashes.

No one could interrupt that solemn reverie by a word.

After a time he spoke:

"Yes—*she died*! I had three children on my hands—the Baby and them twins, the God-blessed two creetur's on airth. I sold out, niggers, farm and all—I couldn't stay thar! I had jest enough, all debts paid and a stone put over *her* grave, to get here, buy this island, build this cabin and *live*!"

"I came here with my gals, here they've grown up, we've lived here happy, and here I expect to die. I owe no debts—I try to be a *man*! No whisky comes *here*—the curse o' that has never got this side o' *her* grave! Rest content here with my gals to-night—in the morning we'll talk about gettin' you-uns to Baltimore, or to Norfolk, anyway!"

There was a hush, while the soft gray of twilight fell on the scene. Sadie and Melisse, grave and silent, had shed tears of sympathy while that good old man had told his sad, but simple story. Every word had come up out of a brave, sorrow-stricken heart.

It was dark when "Baby," who had assumed charge inside of the house, called them all in to supper.

It was a quiet, homely meal, but some way our heroines felt a security, a confidence of protection there that took away all fear. And when the old man had every weapon examined and turned the dog out-of-doors to keep watch, they retired to rest on a *feather-bed* in one of the rude bunks, confident that if attacked they would be bravely defended.

The night passed quietly—no alarm—nothing to trouble them.

And the poor girls *slept* for the first time since they were torn away from home and friends, a hopeful, dreamless, restful slumber.

They woke, hearing the old hunter astir, at the first break of day.

"Gals," said he, addressing the twins at the breakfast-table, which was set twenty minutes later, "there's a heap o' work ahead of us, and powerful little time to do it in. I'm goin' to Norfolk, *maybe* all the way to Baltimore with these gals—goin' till I see 'em safe with their friends. God has put 'em on my hands, and He'd never forgive me if I deserted 'em."

"Nor—nor we wouldn't either, dad. We'll stick as long as you will!" said Sally, and Jemima added:

"You bet!"

"Well, as I said," the old man continued, "there's a heap o' work to do, and we've got to divide up to do it. There's the salt over in the

dryin'-pans on the beach—that *must* be got in, for the Equinox is coming on, and rain will spile my three months' savings. I'd like to run down the bay in one o' the boats to try an' discover if any o' them pirates 's a-hoverin' about. Can you gals run over with the biggest boat and scoop in that salt while I'm gone?"

"In course we can, dad. It'll be jest play for us. Not more'n thirty or forty buckets of it at most," cried Sally.

"Wal, you do *that*—Baby and the Baltimore gals will keep house, and when I get back I don't know now what'll hinder us in startin'. The dog is as good on watch as half a dozen men—better nor *some*, for he'll *bite* as well as *bark*, when he's cornered up."

"Dad—he's barkin' now! Some one is comin'!" cried the Baby.

"So there is! I hear oars, too! To your guns, gals, to your *guns*—shut the door. We've peep-holes to use, if we have to!"

CHAPTER XL.

A VISITOR.

In less than a minute, with closed doors, the oldest girls gun in hand and the others armed in one way or another, and the old man looking through a chink in the logs, with his double-barreled gun ready in his hands, the garrison was prepared for battle.

The dog barked furiously and ran toward the wharf, while the heavy beat of oars in the rowlocks could be distinctly heard.

"Be ready gals—be ready; and you, miss,"—to Sadie—"be here to see if they're the men you got away from. If they're enemies, we must get the first fire, afore they're ashore, while they're in a clump."

Sadie, with an ax in her hand for a weapon went to his side and looked through the crevice between the logs.

The prow of a boat was seen as it rounded the foot of the island and headed for the wharf. A second more and it was evident that but one pair of oars propelled it.

Next a pair of broad shoulders, a bare, frowzy head of yellow or saffron hair, and two great red arms plying the oars vigorously, came in sight.

As the boat touched the wharf the rower rose, clutched the painter and jumped on shore to fasten it.

"It is the hateful woman who drove us from the light-house!" said Sadie.

"Sart'in as shootin'! It is Barney Buglin's woman—the first time she has ever been here. I'll see what she wants!"

And the old man strode to the door, threw it open, and met the scrawny virago as she strode up the path.

"Be you the cr'ather they call Zebe Snooks?" was her first salutation.

"My name is Zebulon Snooks!" replied the old man. "Yours, if I aren't off the trail, is Missis Barney Buglin!"

"Yes, and bad 'cess to the hour when I took it. I see my ould man's canoe down thar, an' I'm after it. Where's the brazen hussies that stole it?"

"The girls are here to whom your husband *lent* it when their very lives were at stake!" cried Sadie, coming forward. "He told us not only to take it, but where to come to, and we are here!"

"There is no n'ade of yer tellin' me *thet* when my eyes are sore wid lookin' at yez!"

"You can look the other way!"

"Can I? Then I *won't*. There's them that's lookin' another way that *may* look *this* way afore ye are much older, Miss *Impudence*. It'll not be my fault if you don't see 'em aither!"

"Woman, what do you mean by that threat?" cried the old man, sternly, striding up to the virago.

"Who do you call a woman, ye ould fish-peddler?"

"I made a mistake and called *you* a woman instead of the miserable drunken *hag* that you are! I want to know, and that right soon, too, what you meant by that threat?"

"Ask my *fat*!"

And the woman threw something forward that had a number ten *brogan* on it for his inspection.

"Sally, bring me a rope here—a stout one!" said the old man, and his great, broad hand clutched Mrs. Buglin's arm with a force that made her shriek.

"Let go o' me, ye ould b'aste! Let go o' me, or I'll scratch yer eyes out!" she shrieked.

"I've handled wild-cats afore!" he said, grimly. "Scratch, an' I'll cut your claws! You have threatened two poor, defenseless girls who are under my protection, and unless I am satisfied that you mean no harm to them, and are *not* knowin' that harm from some one else is a-comin' to 'em, I'll tie you hand and foot, and keep you here until I know they are safe and beyond the reach of danger!"

"You b'aste, you'll be hung for this!"

"Then I'll hang in a good cause."

"D'ye know ye are committin' high trayson? Aren't I a Government officer—the k'aper of a light-house?"

"No—Barney Buglin is the keeper!"

"An' I'm his k'aper! Light yer hand off o' me or I'll have ye in Washington afore the President inside of the w'ake!"

And she struggled to free herself, but in vain. She was brawny and stout, but the man who held her was a Samson in comparison.

Sally brought the rope, and by order of her father tied Mrs. Buglin's hands behind her back.

She was then marched inside the house and forced down on a bench with her back against the logs which formed one side of the house. Another rope secured her in that position.

She raved for a few minutes, but when she saw the two oldest girls getting ready to go for salt and the old man preparing to leave, and heard him tell the baby to keep a watch on her and break her head with the clothes maul if she tried to get loose, she began to weaken.

"Pl'aze, Mither Snooks, I was only a-jokin'. I thought I'd scare them gurls a bit, so they'd pay for the canoe me ould man let 'em have. Don't be hard wid me, pl'aze. I'm a lone woman a-livin' on the desert sands, an' it sours me an' makes me ugly. I'm sorry for all I've said, I am, on me sowl!"

Her voice was changed to a pitiful whine, and she tried to squeeze a tear or two out of her owl eyes. The last was an utter failure.

"And you do not know of any one who intends them harm?"

"Not a sowl since the men wint away that thried to catch them at the light-house, and I'm well-nigh sure they're all dead or took on the men-o'-war. We heard a d'ale of shootin' goin' on down by the Inlet, and then we saw three schooners sint away!"

"It may be so. If I let you go will you take that canoe in tow and go right back to the light-house?"

"Ind'ade I will, an' thank ye kindly for the fave!"

"Then go! And mark me, woman, if I find you up to any wicked deal I'll put a bullet through you if 'tis the last act o' my life. What I say I mean!"

While speaking he unbound her and pointed to the door.

She went out, without another word, but she cast back a look of hate on the poor girls.

"I am afraid she'll do us an ill-turn yet!" said Sadie.

"Don't fear, miss! I'm goin' to give her start enough to get out o' sight, then I'll follow and watch her, while I satisfy myself if there are any parties lurking around that can do ye harm. To-morrow morning we'll start for Norfolk, and if ye don't find friends there, I'll keep on with ye to Baltimore, though I was never that far from home before."

Mrs. Barney Buglin's arm ached too much yet from the iron grip of that giant's hand for her to say a word to anger him which he could hear.

But when she fastened the canoe to the stern of her boat and pushed off to go down the bay, she muttered:

"I'll have my revenge on that owld coon-ater and them lily-faced hussies, see if I don't. 'Twas no idle threat I made, if I did take it all back to get away from the owld rookery. I do know where thim men in the boat went to—'twas up the owld Snake lagoon, an' if they're there this blissed night, afther Barney has got his supper and gone in to light up the tower, I'll find 'em, and maybe git a purse o' gould for what I'll tell 'em!"

Her treatment made her so angry that she pulled away with all the energy in her frame, and though she had the canoe in tow, the old man, Zebulon Snooks could but just keep her in sight when she went down the Bay. But he did see her land at the right landing and take her course to the light-house, and then, though he carefully explored both sides of the Bay, going down and coming up for six or seven miles, he saw neither boats or men to alarm him.

When he returned to his island home, he found the two oldest daughters back with the salt, and learned from the "Baby" that the day had passed there quietly.

The two girls, Melisse and Sadie, had been busy arranging some skirts out of calico, to wear over their masculine dress, for the daughters of the giant hunter were all nearly as large again as they were, and their dresses would not have fitted the slender figures of their guests.

The girls who went for the salt were tired. The salt-pans, where the ocean water was evaporated by the sun, were over on the beach a mile or more from where they had a boat landing, and this distance they had traversed to and fro, bringing the salt in sacks on their shoulders, no less than seven times.

They ate their supper as soon as it was ready and went to bed, for the father said they would all go to Norfolk with the two fugitives in the morning and would start early.

The rest, securing the house, retired later.

CHAPTER XLI.

BETRAYED.

WHEN the pirate pilot steered for a dense grove of monster cypress on the west shore of the Sound, keeping certain bearings of the light-house astern to shape his course by, he was so confident that he knew exactly where the Diab-

locito was, that Spirifort dismissed a startling fear which had entered his breast.

That fear was that Lieutenant James might have proved treacherous and gone off with the schooner, instead of taking her to the hiding-place as promised. If so, Spirifort was in a hard box. He had grown very weak, his wound illy dressed at first had suffered from neglect, and without prompt surgical aid of the best kind and a good place for rest, he knew he would go under.

But the river pirate was no slouch; he knew where he was going, for he had been there with Lieutenant James, or Scar-faced Jim, as he called him, and was sure he would find his old leader there.

And he did, to Spirifort's intense joy, though they were twice hailed by pickets before reaching the Diablocito.

Great was the rejoicing on board the Diablocito when once more the pirate chief stood on her deck. The crew were sick of lying cooped in that noxious swamp, full of snakes, owls and hideous shadows.

The light of the sun only fell on them at noon-day; the fresh touch of a cooling breeze never reached its dark depths.

Jumbo shed tears of joy over his master's return, which changed to grief when he saw how badly he was wounded and how much he suffered. The negro steward and cook almost worshipped his master. Years had gone by since the chief spared his one life, while he sent a whole ship's crew down to death. And during all this he had been well fed, well clothed and well treated, and made rich and valuable gifts.

Jumbo hurried for the surgeon as soon as his master was laid upon his bed, and the latter after administering stimulant freely went to work on his courageous patient.

The badly-set arm had to be reset, for it had not begun to knit, and was in a fearful state of inflammation, threatening to mortify. That done, he had to probe for and extract the bullet from Spirifort's thigh.

Thrice the pirate fainted during this operation and it left him weak and imperatively in need of rest.

He would not allow any one to disturb him with a question or ask for an order until he had slept at least twelve or fourteen hours.

So Lieutenant James had to get the history of Spirifort's first success and after mishaps from his former comrade in the river business.

The latter, after telling the story in all its details including the escape of the girls and the direction they took, wanted to fit out an armed boat and to go after them, for the promise of having the beautiful blonde to tame had made him wild to recover her and the other.

But Scar-faced Jim was firm and said no—not until the captain himself gave the order, would he stir in the matter.

He, for his own part, never wanted to see a woman on board. He believed that they always brought bad luck with them, and would rather see them sink to the bottom of the sea than to aid in bringing them where he was.

So the crew all had to rest contented as they could in the swamp that night and another day until the captain was able to stand up once more, take food to strengthen him and talk with his subordinates about his future course.

Then—and not till then did a thought of the fugitive girls come into his mind. And when he did think, the time which had elapsed made it probable in his mind that they had reached some town in the interior where he could not overtake them.

It was well on in the night, and he was talking this matter over with his late pilot on the oyster schooner, whom he had promoted to third officer and brought into his cabin, and listening to the objections of Scar-faced Jim, when an episode occurred which altered things in a hurry.

A picket-boat came up the lagoon bringing a woman who had boldly pulled in in her own skiff, and when hailed said she wanted to see the lame captain with a red scar on his face, that had been at the light-house. She had news for him that he'd give "a purse o' gould" to hear.

He ordered her brought into the cabin instantly. And when she entered he knew her at a glance.

"What brought you here?" he asked, sternly.

"My skiff, till I was foreninst the lagoon. Then one of your boats tuk me up, yer honor!"

"Your business, that is what I mean?"

"To tell yer honor a saycret—somethin' that 'll make yer honor's heart l'ape for joy, and when ye've heard me I think ye'll pull out a purse o' gould and say Colleen Buglin, take that as a tok'n!"

"I have no secrets from my officers here. Speak, and if what you say is worth paying for, you shall be well paid!"

"Thin, yer honor, it's about thim hussies of gurrils that run away from yez and got to the light-house, and then run off wid my ould man's canoe. I've seen 'em this day wid me own eyes and got the canoe back!"

"Where are they?"

"Up the bay, wid an ould scapegrace of a fisherman and his three daughters, on an island—they're there, pert and sassy as kittens!"

"How far from here?"

"Sure and I couldn't say to a mile or two. I could row a boat there in the dark in three or four hours!"

"There is a purse of gold for you!" said Spirifort, bidding Jumbo bring it from his chest. "And if you'll pilot a boat up there which I'll send full of armed men to capture and bring them back, you shall have another just as heavy!"

"Howly saints—isn't this luck? To be sure I'll do it. And when I've that much gould to the fore, I'll quit livin' in the desertsands o' Hatteras, whether ould Barney Buglin goes wid me or not. Get me a bite to ate and a sup o' drink, anything that isn't wather, and I'm ready to go!"

Jumbo was ordered to set out food and liquor, and the river pilot was told to pick ten good men, arm them well, and, taking the woman as a guide, go at once and recapture the girls.

The thought of one man and five girls resisting eleven armed men did not once enter the head of the chief.

Within an hour—an hour past midnight it was, the boat was manned and on her way out of the lagoon.

It was very dark, and a drizzling rain began to fall, and it was difficult to see how to steer to hold the course the woman wanted to take. By the light-house alone could she get the right bearings, and even with its aid, the boat ran aground on reedy marshes and stuck on low, grassy islands several times.

"Curse it, woman—we'll not get there before daylight at this rate!" cried the excited and impatient leader of the party, when they grounded.

"Sure an' what's the matter if we don't? Can't we see all the better how to get at thim? Don't fret, honey—the bay is gettin' 'asier the further up we go! I'll have you there yit afore the chickens crow!"

It was almost time for day to dawn when the barking of a dog was heard by the boatmen, not far away.

"Pull up now—pull lively, honeys—it's their whiffet cur we hear! We're almost there—here's the ind of the island—hould on or ye'll be right atop of it!"

CHAPTER XLII.

A CLEW.

FREQUENTLY from the outside the lookouts aloft on the Shark could see the cutter slowly standing down the Sounds of Roanoke and Albemarle, the great inland water-course protected by the sandy beach against which the Atlantic surges wildly roll from year to year.

Captain Coste was making a thorough search, as was at last proven by his finding and capturing in a nook, or bay, hidden by a swampy timber growth, a periagua, or small sloop, with its mast stepped in the very bow, without any jib—only one large, long sail. This boat of three or four tons contained five runaway negroes that he cared little to have on his hands. These fellows, frightened almost to death, acknowledged that they were fugitives and had stolen the boat on the Eastern shore, and said they had come near being taken once before.

A big black schooner full of men had almost run over them up by the inlet where the tall light-house stood.

Captain Coste's eyes flashed with joy when he heard this, and he told them they should go free if they told him the truth, and where this big craft had gone.

"She runned right in among de trees ober in de west, jess a little way up from dat 'ar light-house, marsta!"

"Dat's de trufe! Massa, we seen her go in dar clean out o' sight wid our own eyes!" said another.

The rest corroborated the story, one saying that she went out of sight so quick he thought she was bewitched.

"How long ago was this?" asked Captain Coste.

"Jess four days gone by, sah!" said the most intelligent of the five.

"Can she not have come out since?"

"I hardly done think so. We laid right close by dar two days and she no come out, and we hear 'em shoot muskets in de swamp dar de arternoon ob de night we sailed down de bay. I reckon she is in dar yet, sah—maybe got away back whar dar's turpentine."

"If I set you free and give you provisions to last you a month, will you boys show me faithfully where she went in? I'll take your periagua in tow so you shall not lose her."

"Sart'in, marsta! Dat's better dan we hope for. We niggahs nebber would hab run away if ole marsta had libbed. But he done gone an' died, and den his sons dey was all for hoss-racin' an' sprees, an' dey put a Yankee oberseer ober us dat licked de berry lives out of us and made us work from daylight to dark and nebber gib us a Saturday. We couldn't stan' dat, sah, and den de young marstahs dey got short o' money and sold off a dozen ob de bestest men and wimmen to go to de sugar-cane country. So we took de perog an' left!"

"Dat's all de trufe, Mars' Cap'n, and if we on'y git to Bermudy* we'll be free!" chimed in another.

* Bermuda.

"Well, help me to find the schooner you described and I don't care where you go. Nigger-catchin' isn't in my line of duty!" said the honest old captain.

This point settled, the next thing was to communicate with the Shark.

As soon as a clear sight of her overland was got, a signal flew from the fore-truck of the Campbell.

It was read on the Shark by her signal officer thus:

"Meet us at Okracoke Inlet. Have heard from the pirate—want your cooperation. She is in a trap."

It was near night, when both vessels, steering north again, were almost becalmed and a mean, drizzling rain came on.

The cutter, drifting with a feeble tide, made slow way toward the place of rendezvous, while the Shark, pitching and rolling in a heavy sea without wind enough to steady her, had a nasty time of it.

All the night and over half the next day this weather tormented them. Then a light breeze from the east filled their canvas and soon the Shark lay hove to, heading east, outside the bar of Okracoke.

In his largest boat, well manned, Lieutenant Chandler, with young Ridgewood at his side, passed over the dangerous breakers on the bar and boarded the Campbell.

There the colored men were submitted to a rigid re-examination, and as they did not change in their story on any point, those who heard took credence enough in it to decide on a course of action.

"By all the signs, we shall have a shift of wind by or before morning!" said Captain Coste. "It will come out from the west or northwest. While it holds where it is, if the pirate is in there he couldn't get out, for no craft in a light easterly wind can beat out over Hatteras Inlet bar. But when it comes westerly, he'll have no trouble. If I get up there and stir him up in his hiding-place, he is so much heavier than my cutter that he'll be like to come out and tackle me, thinking he'll use me up in no time!"

"And he would, sir—he has three heavy guns to one of your light ones!" said Ridgewood. "No matter how brave yourself, officers and crew are, he would hopelessly overmatch you. The Shark is the craft I want to see laid alongside of him!"

"I hope we can both have a crack at him!" said Captain Coste. "Such a wretch deserves no chances in his favor. Murderous robber that he is, all honest men's hands should be against him—all brave men should be anxious to destroy him!"

"Well—for our plans!" said Lieutenant Chandler. "My vessel draws too much water to cross that bar in safety. She can be jumped over it at high tide, I know, but we might ground, and then, if we did not thump the keel off of her, we would be helpless. If we can only coax the craft outside, then I'll take all the chances, fearlessly!"

"If I can draw her out from her hiding-place, and then pretend fear and scud over the bar, we may get her where we want to!" said Coste.

"Yes—and as there is a growth of pines north of the inlet that will hide a craft from view on the Sound, I can get that berth to-night while you do your work inside. If you are attacked or crowded in there, I can take all my boats in to help you. When you discover him, let three rapid cannon-shot at night be your signal."

"All right then, sir. I'll move up inside, and we'll see or hear from each other near Hatteras in the morning!"

This settled, the naval commander again crossed the rough and dangerous bar and sailed northward once more. Night soon came on, covering their movements in the convenient shroud of darkness. Fast was the network of justice forming to entrap the wretch whose whole life had been depravity and cruelty condensed. But, desperate as he and his crew were known to be, it was no light task before those who were to beard the tiger in his lair.

CHAPTER XLIII.

DADDY.

THE family of Zebulon Snooks were all astir before daybreak, getting breakfast by the light of pine knots blazing in the big fire-place so as to make an early start for Norfolk. As he had decided on the night before to take his three girls as a friendly escort to our heroines, they were busy in putting on the best they had, to do honor to the occasion, when the sharp barking of the watchful Witch-hazel, their faithful sentinel by night and by day, startled all hands.

The old man, gun in hand, started out to see what was the matter. No one appeared to be at the wharf, which he could dimly see in the gray of dawn—but the dog was down near the lower end of the little island.

Listening he heard voices there and then the sound of oars—it seemed as of many in a full-manned boat, not pulling in unison.

He bounded back into the house and cried out in a low stern tone:

"Clutch your guns, gals—they wretches are coming. I heard that she-devil's voice, the hag

I should never have let go, and she no doubt has brought them here. But they'll have hot lead for breakfast!"

He closed the door and fastened it, and threw water on the fire to put out the blaze from pine knots which made it so light within.

"Get your powder and shot handy—we've got to fight devils instead of b'ar and wild-cats now!" he said to his girls, as he threw the strap of his powder-horn and bullet-pouch over his shoulder.

A minute later he and his girls, with their guns pointed at the landing and resting on the logs from which they had torn the chinking, near the door, saw the boat dash alongside the little pier.

"They're all here—there isn't a boat gone. Maybe the devils are aslape!"

The sharp voice of Mrs. Barney Buglin uttered these words.

"Dad—let's give it to 'em!" whispered Jemima.

"Yes, dad, while they're all in a lump!" echoed Sally.

"Do not spare them, for if they conquer they will not spare us!" whispered Melisse, who stood by the door with Sadie, one armed with an ax—the other with a fish-spear.

Baby had a tea-kettle full of hot water in her hands—a woman's weapon, but not a pleasant one for even a strong man to meet.

"Aim low—right at the bow of the boat—fire!" said the old man.

And at the last word the three shots, making but one report, rung out, and in a second yells of agony, curses of wrath and shrieks filled the air.

"Load, gals! load quick, while I hold my second barrel ready!" cried the old man, speaking only loud enough to be heard in the house. "See, them that can are forming on the wharf! Hurry—I must give them this barrel afore they start!"

He fired as he spoke and a man dropped while the woman shrieked out:

"Go for the murtherin' devils, go—I'm shot, I'm kilt intirely—out an' out!"

There was a rush of four men—swearing fearfully and firing pistols at the house; but the two girls had their guns ready now and fired when the men were within ten feet of the dwelling.

Three went down in a heap, but the fourth, wild and desperate, thinking, if he thought, there were more to help him, threw himself with all his force against the door, breaking the wooden latch that secured it and stumbling inside.

He was met by a blow from Sadie's ax, which staggered him almost to the floor; there as the blow was repeated, Melisse pinned him down with her spear, and a shriek of terrible agony rose from his lips when the kettle of hot water emptied right in his face and eyes completed the work.

"They're trying to get away. Load, gals, and follow me!" cried the old man, who had shoved a handful of powder and another of shot into each barrel of his ducking-gun.

Reaching the wharf, he was fired at from the boat now a rod or two away, drifting, rather than being pushed by one of the wounded men.

He felt that he was hard hit, but the heroic old man sighted his gun as carefully as he could and poured both barrels into the boat. There were one or two shrieks and groans, but he did not hear them—he fell back on the wharf, the life-blood gushing from his breast.

"Dad—dad—dear dad, speak to me!" cried Sally, rushing to his side and trying to raise his limp form in her arms.

Jemima, drawing her deadliest aim fired into the boat, before she bent over her father's form.

"Stop—for the Lord's sake! I very man is dead but me, an' I'm a-dying!" shrieked the treacherous wife of Barney Buglin from the drifting boat.

The two agonized girls, now joined by the rest, paid no further attention to the boat, neither to the dead men on the wharf.

They lifted the giant frame of their hero father—those three strong girls, and carried it tenderly within the house.

The dead river pirate and former pilot of the oysterman lay upon the floor, three more just before the door, riddled with buckshot; yet not one of those girls cast a look of either anger, horror or pity on those bleeding forms.

Every look, every thought was devoted to that poor old man. They bathed his white face with cold water, they placed some to his lips and Melisse and Sadie with some old newspapers fanned him to give him air.

Already Sally the coolest of all, had torn open his clothing from over the wound and was trying to stop the bleeding by pressing folded cloth upon it.

The wound was right above the heart—the bullet seeming to have gone deep into the body.

"Had you not best let the blood run out of the wound than force it back to bleed inside?" said Melisse. "My dear father studied surgery so as to be useful at the Mission, where we live when at home, and I saw him treat a wounded Indian so. He merely washed the wound with cold water, and after a time the bleeding stopped of itself. The Indian was shot accidentally just in the same place as this!"

"We'll try it. Anything, everything to save

dad! We'd die if he does! He's the best man in all the world!"

Sadie had a bottle of ammonia, smelling-salts, in her pocket, which till now was unthought of. Its pungent odor applied to his nostrils brought back the first sign of life in the old man.

A feeble moan broke from his lips, and he unclosed his eyes, which had shutdown in his faintness.

"Are they all done for, whipped off?" was the first question that left his lips.

"Yes, yes, father! Don't try to talk—we are doing our best for you! Baby, do stop that cryin', you only make dad worse!" cried Sally.

"They hit me hard, didn't they? But I had a bead on 'em—I paid 'em back!" he said, in a whisper. He could speak no louder.

"Yes, dad—yes—their boat is driftin' down the bay without a livin' soul to lift an oar. An' there's six dead 'uns here ashore. Keep still—we're safe. Sha'n't we send to Norfolk for a doctor? You can't be moved now!"

"Yes—yes—take those poor girls out of danger! You 'uns go and leave me here. If it's God's will, I'll live. If it isn't, I'm ready to go! I've lived as square as I knew how!"

"We will not leave you! You are suffering for us! Our duty is here, and here we stay, till you are better!" cried Sadie.

"Or die! You might as well say it! I know it, gals. I'm terrible hard hit. The chances are ag'in' me—ten to one, like them cusses were to us awhile ago!"

"But we beat 'em, dad—don't give up now!" cried Jemima, for the first time shedding tears.

"I'll stick as long as I can, gals—be kind o' still, Baby—maybe I kin sleep, an' 'twill do me good!"

Instantly the youngest girl choked down her sobs. Her heart was almost broken to see him there, suffering so. But if tears and sobs disturbed him, she would choke them down, no matter how hard it was to do. She had been his idol! He had been to her father, mother, almost all she had in the world.

It was pitiful.

Tears, silent, but none the less the rain of true grief, ran down the cheeks of the two girls whom, at such cost, he had so nobly defended.

In a little time he slept. Melisse had Sally put a cloth wet with cold water over his hot brow. And as it evaporated, she gently dampened it, feeling often of his pulse, and watching anxiously a hectic flush that came and went on brow and face—all that could be seen from the covering his long, silvery beard left.

The two oldest girls now went out and performed a stern duty themselves, because they had no other help. The tide was running ebb down the bay. The boat, with its contents, had drifted out of sight to the southward.

The duty alluded to was to dispose of the dead. They could have buried them on the island. But they did not want such carcasses on their ground. It might soon become sacred to them, if they had to lay their dear father down beneath the shade of its ancient trees.

They dragged the pirate fiends one by one to the end of the pier where the tide ran fast to the south and cast the bodies into the sea. The burial was good enough, though not a word was spoken when they disappeared from view.

When every dead man was out of sight and only gory stains left to mark where they had been, the two brave girls came back to the house, washed their hands with soap and quietly took seats near his bed. He slept nervously, with frequent starts and low murmurs, but he slept, and Melisse whispered that his pulse was strong and full, though fitful—now slow, then fast.

Hours passed by and scarce a change. Once he woke, asked in a whisper for water, drank a little and fell asleep again.

Often Sally or Jemima asked if there would be any use to go for a doctor.

"We have done all a doctor would do," said Melisse. "Before a doctor comes he will rally for recovery, come out of this deathlike sleep, or suddenly sink away and go. I have seen cases like his, and I know what I say."

They waited. They could do no more. Many and many a prayer went up that day to Heaven while the gentle wind sighed through the long-leaved pines and the rain fell softly on the roof shingled by his hands.

Night came—a very little change. Melisse thought it for the better, only she thought he slept too long. Yet she dared not wake him. He was no longer nervous. The twitches and starts were less frequent. The pulse yet held full.

Oh, how hard it is for a strong man, right in every habit, pure in blood and clear in brain—to die.

Death has no place for a foothold.

Baby quietly got a little supper and laid it on the table. No one wanted any, and it remained there—untouched.

Hour after hour—a little clock upon a slab mantle or shelf over his head told the time and he did not wake.

His breath came a little faster, his pulse quickened, though it was weaker and the color deepened on his face.

The girls in their happy ignorance thought

these good signs. Only Melisse, who with her dear uncle, the priest, and her good father had been at more than one death-bed, knew differently, and she dared not tell.

More often did she drop cooling water on the bandage over his brow—more constantly move the fan that gave him air.

The night passed away and he was yet alive. It was more than Melisse had expected.

"I've made him some store tea and baked some flour biscuit. Can't I wake him?" asked the youngest girl—his Baby.

"If you like. He is sleeping more than is good for him," said Melisse.

Yet she trembled for the result. She could barely feel that a little pulse was left, and his breath came very short.

Baby pressed his hand, bent down and kissed his bluish-white lips and said:

"Daddy! Daddy! Look up—it is me—Baby!"

Slowly his great gray eyes opened.

"Child," he whispered, "you have called me back from Heaven. I was with your mother—God was good, forgave her sins and took her home. She is happy—and I—well, God knows best—he will take care of you when I am gone!"

"Father—DADDY—you're not going to die!"

"Yes, I be, Baby, or I wouldn't been up there!"

He pointed up with his hand—growing so cold, so white.

The other girls gathered closer to him.

His whisper grew stronger; he could have been heard all over the room.

"Gals," he said, looking at Melisse and Sadie, "I've done what I could for ye. I'm not sorry for it. Don't fret and worry and blame yourselves, for I'd have done as much for any livin' thing, even a persecuted dog. Don't cry—I'm not a-feelin' bad. The pain has all gone. I'm only thinkin' o' them!"

He looked at his children, who stood silent and trembling—great tears falling fast from their eyes, yet every sob stifled lest the sound should give him pain.

"While we live and have a home—they shall share it with us!" cried Sadie, choking with grief.

"No—no—'tain't that, though I thank ye. I know they'll not leave here, for I want to be buried here on my own land, and I know they'll not go away. But comfort 'em all you can—help 'em if they need it, and come and see 'em and talk to 'em of the old man who died for you!"

"We will—we will!" sobbed both the girls.

"Hark—is that thunder?" he asked, as a distant sound came rolling up the bay.

"No—no—I hear it again; it is a cannon speaking death and destruction to the pirate fiends!"

Three successive shots, then for a time all was still, and the old man, slowly, surely sinking, kept listening while his breath grew shorter and shorter.

The girls did not count time. They all knew now that he was surely going.

Suddenly he started. Sharp, strong, loud, gun after gun, and it seemed as if whole broadsides were fired, reached every ear, and roused him up so that he rose to a sitting posture.

"Ha! hear that!" he cried. "The pirates are at bay; their end is coming; the hand of the avenger is raised; the blood of the innocent has not been shed in vain!"

His voice was strong as ever for a brief moment, and his gray eyes flashed with the old, fierce light.

"Hark how gun answers gun—blood is flowing like the water from a thousand springs! There—there—hear that? Down, down to eternal perdition have they gone, and—girls, where are ye? How dark it grows!"

He fell back, while the house and ground shook with a concussion that all felt, and a dull, heavy sound louder than any thunder reached their ears.

He was dead.

Now—as the floods of heaven fall when its gates are open to the summer storm, those daughters gave way to overpowering, heart-broken grief. Their tears fell in showers, their sobs filled the air, their strong forms bent like willows in a gale as they knelt over his body.

"Daddy is dead!" wailed poor Baby. "I have no daddy now!"

"Why couldn't I have died and he lived?" shrieked Sally.

"He was all to us, and he is gone!" moaned Jemima.

Melisse carefully closed those great, sad gray eyes. She took her own cambric handkerchief, which she had washed that morning, and passing it under his jaws, crossed and tied it above his head, to keep his pale lips closed and preserve his natural look.

And Sadie opened a chest from which she had seen the girls take clean sheets for their bed, and took a sheet and laid it reverently over his body.

Then the two went out, leaving those three orphans to weep, since tears were their best relief.

The sound of the cannonade below had long

ceased. With that one tremendous shock, the battle, if it was a battle as they believed, had ended!

They hoped and prayed that the pirates had been attacked, defeated and destroyed. But they could not tell. It might be that they were victorious. If so—

"Hark—I hear oars!" cried Melisse.

"Yes—yes—there are boats full of men coming up the bay—oh, what shall we do?"

Both girls ran into the house and gave the alarm.

But those mourners never stirred.

Only Sally raised her head to answer:

"They've killed daddy, let them kill us, too!" Her words spoke for the rest.

CHAPTER XLIV.

PICKED UP.

THOUGH to some extent grateful that her newly-recovered son had not been mortally wounded as at first supposed, Mrs. Ridgewood almost collapsed under the terrible suspense attending the fate of her daughter and her son's betrothed, Melisse Duprét.

Sympathizing friends were plentiful, and her physicians, the best in the "Monumental City," did all they could to sustain her, but she completely broke down with grief and despair over her daughter's fate. Not until she received a brief note from her son, sent in on the oyster boat, did she have any hope.

This note was in these words:

"Our darlings, Sadie and Melisse are heard from. They are alive—we hope unharmed. We are close upon the pirates and will not leave their track until those we love are rescued and the fiends who have done such fearful wrong are captured or destroyed forever. I pray Heaven Mr. Duprét is recovering and that you, my dear mother, will be sustained until I return crowned with success."

"The commander of the Shark treats me as if I were a brother, and I am full of hope."

"Lovingly your son,

"E. M. RIDGEWOOD."

This letter she was allowed to read to Mr. Duprét, of whose recovery the surgeons began to have hope. The news did him good as well as it did her a benefit, and the attending physician said neither nursing or medicine would do half as much for both as the safe return of their children.

The news of course was spread through the columns of the press, and friends called or sent in their congratulations without stint.

"I have never lost faith since your son started!" said Mr. Duprét to Mrs. Ridgewood, after she read the letter to him.

"In the first place," he continued, "he is brave, next he is prompted by the most tender, yet the most powerful of all passions—lastly, I have confidence in the great goodness of the ALL POWERFUL above, who will not let iniquity triumph while innocence suffers!"

"I feel as you do," said the lady, "but we must not weaken you with conversation."

The very next day Norfolk papers contained still further news.

The oyster schooner had been recaptured by the revenue-cutter sent from Baltimore and the pirates chased into temporary hiding. As the girls were not seen, it was hoped they had escaped, and further news was expected hourly.

It will be seen that no topic of that day held public attention more closely, and when it was known how many vessels-of-war and revenue cutters were engaged in the search, there seemed a certainty that the pirate craft would be caught and destroyed.

The police in Baltimore were most anxious to have their murdered comrades avenged, and wanted the pirate taken alive so they could have a "hanging festival" in the city.

Thus glancing at some whom we have been forced to neglect while describing other stirring scenes, we will go back to the boat which drifted off after the wounded defender of our heroines had fired his last shot of vengeance into her.

That terrible shower of lead had almost rid-dled the bodies of the only two men left alive in the boat and again stricken the already badly wounded wife of Barney Buglin.

Though alive—she dared not raise her voice again for fear of drawing another shot, and bleeding, dying she believed, she crouched down beside the dead and let the boat drift without making an effort to guide it.

The tide at ebb bore it along quite rapidly until she saw in the distance the tall tower where she knew her husband was at work cleaning and filling his lamps.

"Och, Barney—what'll he say whin he finds me dead kilt and gone? An' wid these men in me company, dead as ould herrin's!"

The boat glided on, and the tide carried it in sight of the landing whence she had departed the night before on her treacherous errand.

She tried now to rise, so that she might endeavor to get the boat in or in some way attract Barney's notice if he looked that way from his lofty station.

The effort was vain. She could not move. One leg was broken—both arms had got buck-shot or ball through them, and another had passed into her body and seemed to paralyze her—for she had no power to raise more than her

head a little over the thwart against which she had fallen. The cold rain and wind seemed to have checked the bleeding of her wounds and kept her from immediate death.

On—past the landing, with no sign of help, and the woman groaned in despair.

"It's to say I'll be swept, an' I'll die on the ocean, an' poor Barney will never see his colleen again!" she moaned. "Och, an' it's the punishment I'm getting before death as well as what will come afther it, wid no absolution or comfort to me sowl. The two purses of gould burn in me pocket, for they're the devil's own temptation to me. Barrin' a bit o' ugliness now an' thin I was an honest woman till I saw the gould and wanted more! Och hone! Och hone! It's all over wid me, an' Barney, he'll niver know how I died or—Howly saints—what's that?"

A cannon-shot fired close to her, a second and then a third, gave her new fear, and with a desperate effort she raised her head enough to see a vessel close to her.

She shrieked as loud as despair would let her, and she was heard, and a boat sent to take the one she was in alongside of the vessel.

Then she was lifted up and the terrible agony took all consciousness from her, and she knew no more. Before she came to enough to speak to those near by she had a dim consciousness of terrible noises around her—of sounds like thunder, and when she did recover enough to see and hear, she saw she was in a dark hold with wounded men lying around to whom surgeons were rendering aid.

A man who saw her open her eyes called to an officer:

"The woman that was picked up is coming to, sir, at last."

"Who are you, woman?" asked the officer, sternly.

"I'm a dyin' sinner, sorr!" she whined. "Ould Barney Buglin's wife, sorr!"

"What were you doing in the boat in which we found you with four dead men all riddled with bullets?"

"I bel'ave I was dyin' whin I last remimber!" she whined.

"Where had you been?"

"Wid them men up to Zeb Snooks's Island afther two gurruls that got away from the men. They gave me red gould to show 'em where they were, bad 'cess to them and their gould since I'm kilt for it!"

"You are not dead yet! Are the girls you speak of alive—where they can be found?"

The woman grew too faint to answer. Terror had partially revived her. But she was so weak she sunk down in another swoon.

Stimulants were forced between her lips, her wounds bathed, and once more she could speak.

Other men were near her now—officers of rank, and a surgeon raised her so they could see her while she was questioned.

"My good woman," said one whom they called captain, "you are very weak, but if you will try to answer me a question or two we'll let you rest. You are in a bad way, but with care you may live. So speak, gently—you need not try to talk loud!"

"I couldn't if I thried—all the blood in me body has run out, I'm thinkin', I'm so w'ake!" she whimpered, in a whining whisper.

"You told my lieutenant about some girls you were after when you got hurt and the men with you were killed. Where can they be found?"

"Up the bay wid Zeb Snooks on his island—two hours' pull from the light-house. But he'll not let you have 'em. Him an' his darters fought tin or a dozen men besides me an' kilt us all!"

"So far so well!" said the officer; then, turning to a man who stood near, he said:

"Mr. Ridgewood, take two well-armed boats and go up the bay and see if you can find those we look for. The only man saved from the schooner says they were never on board of her, and he may speak truth, for he knows he is dying!"

"I have but little hope, but I will go, sir!" said the young man just spoken to.

"Who is this Barney Buglin you spoke of to the doctor?" continued the questioner.

"Me ould man, an' ye'll find him at the light-house. He's the k'aper there, a man wid one arm an' a red face wid de small-pox pits in it he had twinty years ago!"

"Send to the light-house to see if she speaks the truth!" said the officer.

Then he left the woman to the care of the surgeon and his attendants, and left the place.

CHAPTER XLV.

BATTLE.

IN the cutter, Captain Coste, after leaving Okracoke, stood on up the Sound, while the Shark steered the same course outside.

It was early in the day, when, knowing that the Shark was in the anchorage she had proposed, or else under sail near it, he commenced his duty of ferreting the pirates out if they were where the negroes had described as entering—a dense swamp of cypress which they pointed out unhesitatingly, giving as near as they could the precise point.

Keeping under short sail, he ran as close over

to the wooded shore as he could, and then lowering a boat with a dozen well-armed men in it, sent them to seek the channel by which the piratical craft must have entered, if she was there.

The boat had not gone a cable's length from the cutter before she was fired on, and a picket boat sent out by the pirates dashed back into the timber.

Captain Coste instantly fired the three guns agreed upon, and recalling his boat stood over toward the inlet, intending to send some shells into the woods to feel of the enemy, and, if possible, to draw him out.

The boat in returning fell in with a boat half-full of water, with several dead men in it, and a woman terribly wounded—but still alive.

The woman was taken on board—we know who she was, and the boat allowed to drift on, as she was not worth saving in a time like that.

Just as Captain Coste, after sending the woman below, got ready to open fire, he saw the masts and yards of the huge piratical craft emerging from among the trees, evidently scorning so light an antagonist, and coming out to punish his temerity.

Coste bravely opened fire with every gun that he could bring to bear, but the pirate did not answer until clear of the trees and able to make sail.

Then his guns began to open with a fire so hot and galling that Coste, losing several men, some of his sails being pierced, and his cutter likely to be sunk, if indeed he was not boarded by the swarming horde he saw on the pirate's deck, stood for the inlet, to get outside as quick as possible, using every sail he could set to effect his purpose.

The pirates, cheering madly as they saw him fly, crowded sail to follow, and the tide running out, they were over the bar before he was half a mile away.

Having eyes only for their gallant little antagonist, they sent shot after shot at her, and did not know the trap about to be sprung upon them until a sweeping broadside came crashing into them from the north, and then they saw to their bewilderment a vessel full as large as theirs bearing down upon them from the spot where she had laid, masked by the trees from an earlier view.

Spirifort, in spite of his wounds, was on deck, and aided by Scar-faced Jim, yelled to his men that they must fight now to the bitter end, for they must sink the new-comer or be sunk themselves.

The cutter, tacking, now poured in her iron hail from every gun she could bring to bear, while the Shark, also tacking, threw in her other broadside, cutting down the pirate's foremast and crippling her movements, while her scuppers ran red with the blood of the fallen men.

But Spirifort, yet unscathed in this fire, and Scar-faced Jim rallied every man that could stand to the guns, and the Shark soon felt the effects of the desperate resistance the pirates made.

Shot answered shot, and fast as men were cut down at their guns others supplied their places, and the battle raged horribly for a time.

At last the mainmast of the Diablocito fell, and the black flag that Spirifort had hoisted as a sign of no surrender, went down with it.

"Do you give up?" shouted Lieutenant Chandler, as his vessel swept by the hulk of the shattered and dismasted pirate.

"NEVER!" yelled Spirifort, firing a pistol-shot with his only able hand that tore through the lieutenant's cap, grazing his head.

And a gun aimed by Scar-faced Jim sent a charge of grape-shot through the bow port of the Shark, killing all the men at the gun there, as they were in the act of running it out after loading to fire.

"Boarders away! We'll end this!" shouted Chandler, and turning to the helmsman he gave orders to put the helm up so they could wear and come under the lee of the enemy.

The sail-trimmers were at their stations, and skillfully the beautiful schooner, partly cut up aloft as well as below, was brought side to side with the desperate enemy and grappling-irons thrown to hold her there.

All the pirates, not twenty in all, that were left had rushed to Spirifort's side, and foremost, with a huge cutlass in his hand, stood Scar-faced Jim, as the boarders from the man-of-war sprung upon the pirate's quarter-deck.

Spirifort aimed at the first man on board, but his pistol missed fire, and then with a yell of terror he sunk cowering to the deck among his fighting, yelling men.

"Marvel's ghost!" he screamed, but even as he spoke the sword of the man he had most to fear passed through his heart.

"Jim—to the magazine—all's lost!" he shouted as he fell back.

The giant river pirate bounded down the cabin hatchway, and Ridgewood, who knew what the action meant, shouted to Chandler to cast his schooner loose and fill away while he recalled the boarders to their own deck.

Hardly had the Shark shot clear of her sinking enemy, when with a shock which almost shook the masts out of the man-of-war, the pi-

rate's magazine blew up, and spars, planks and dead and dying men filled the air.

As soon as they could, the men-of-war's-men lowered a boat to pick up what was left of that desperate crew.

One man alone, mortally wounded, with but a few hours at most before him, was saved.

He knew Ridgewood, and when questioned about the ladies that Spirifort had stolen from their home, said no such women had been brought to the Diablocito.

Spirifort had been away, and was brought back terribly wounded, and the only woman he had seen on board was an old Irishwoman, who came to their hiding-place with some news for Spirifort and went off in an armed boat with some men.

While the Shark came to an anchor to repair damages, Captain Coste came on board to compare casualties and to congratulate Lieutenant Chandler on the gallant work done and its almost too complete success, since the pirate hull with its millions of treasure was at the bottom of the sea—or all that was left of it.

And he told a strange story of picking up a boat with some dead men in it and a badly wounded Irishwoman who had been in some way connected with the pirates.

"Take us aboard the Campbell quickly, Captain Coste. Come, Ridgewood, we must see this woman?" cried Lieutenant Chandler.

We gave the result of that short interview in our last chapter.

Ridgewood receiving orders, manned the only two boats left fit to float, for the others were badly riddled, and got ready for a search up the bay.

From the cutter a boat had already been sent for Barney Buglin and it was met by Ridgewood just inside the inlet.

He laid on his oars to ask this man if he knew anything about the girls of whom the woman who claimed to be his wife had spoken.

"Indade I do, sir," said honest Barney. "They came to me when they got away from the pirates and I wanted to hide 'em, but me ould woman had the divil in her an' drove 'em off, an' I tould 'em to take my canoe and go up the bay eight or ten miles to an ould fisherman who lives on an island. They couldn't miss the place."

"Give way, men—give way cheerily!" cried Ridgewood, to his boat's crew, while he told the revenue officer to hurry Barney aboard to see his wife.

And as his boats dashed in over the bar and headed up the bay, hope rose in his heart and he felt that he might find his loved ones yet.

The tide had turned and they passed close by the boat with dead pirates in it which the cutter had left adrift. They looked coldly on the ghastly sight, with blood excited by recent events and dashed forward.

For miles their oars rose and fell fast and strong, but the men began to feel very tired when the mournful howling of a dog was heard not far away.

"Cautious, men—be steady and look to your arms—I see a house ahead!" said Ridgewood, as they shuddered to hear that sound—ominous of death.

CHAPTER XLVI.

JOY AND GRIEF.

WHEN Melisse and Sadie saw the boats full of men coming, and heard not the sharp, watchful bark, but the mournful howling of the dog, they flew back to the house to alarm its inmates, and stand once more on defense.

For what could these men, they thought, be but pirates sent to revenge those who had been killed, and carry out the fell purposes of the first.

On hearing the hopeless answer of Sally, as already written—Sadie caught up one gun and Melisse another, not knowing whether they had been reloaded, but determined to die with arms in their hands fighting for honor before capture came, and shame worse, ten thousand times, than death.

The tramp of men approached the door, which they hastened to secure.

Melisse saw a tall form, pale and earnest, marching first of all, and with a wild scream fell in a deathlike faint upon the floor.

Sadie saw the same form—she trembled, looked wildly toward him, stretched out her arms and screamed:

"My brother! Thank God you live!"

The lost were found.

Quickly the gallant young man raised Melisse from the floor and calling to one of the men who all remained outside, bade him bring a flask of wine which he had left in the boat.

But joy does not kill. Before the wine could be used the blue eyes of Melisse glittering with tears beamed on the noble face of her lover, and she was pressed to his manly breast.

Then came the explanation, and the story of their sufferings and escape—of their treatment at the light-house, danger of recapture, escape from that peril, and welcome in that humble home, and the protection given.

Then came the story of the Irishwoman's

treachery, of the attack and the wonderful defense against such odds made by the heroic old man, who lay dead before them, and his brave daughters.

The tale seemed incredible, but the sad proofs of its truth lay before them.

The girls, though told who had come, that friends and protectors were there, hardly raised a head until Ridgewood told of the battle and how every pirate but one, and he mortally wounded, had been slain and blown to atoms and sent to perdition.

"Poor daddy is gone!" said Sally. "But he is revenged. The murderers have all got what they needed, a scorchin'!"

Then they consented, when Ridgewood offered to attend to it, to have their father's body laid out and a coffin made, so that he could be buried like a brave man by men of his kind.

Two of the men were carpenters by trade, and so rated on the ship, and rude as the tools they found were, they took planks and with them made as good a coffin as haste and material would allow.

Then Jemima went and took from an old trunk a suit of clothes which her father scarce ever wore—they had been made for his wedding when he was in the prime and strength of his manhood.

The Baby got the last shirt which she had made for him to wear when he went to town.

These were laid where Ridgewood and his assistants could find them, and then the girls and their sister-guests went out to let the men do their sad work alone.

Meantime, one of the party got the mourning daughters to choose a spot for the grave.

It was selected under a great spreading live oak which looked as if it had withstood the storms of centuries, and could stand for yet a thousand years. On the highest point in the little island, it could be seen from every side, and seemed a fitting resting-place for that giant form.

Here, while the sad preparation was made inside the house, a deep grave was dug and soon all was ready.

The daughters, touched to the heart when they saw how nicely all had been arranged, that their father looking almost as if he lived had been prepared with every care, gave way to the necessity of his immediate burial.

They never could have done it with their own hands—this they knew. And they were told that the boats had to return to the vessel from which they came, with every officer and man on board. And they knew they must part with Sadie and Melisse, who were to be taken back to their parents who were even then mourning them as lost and almost hopeless of their recovery!

So, weeping bitterly, they gave his dear face one last, agonized kiss, one long, lingering, unforgetful look, and then the coffin was closed from mortal eyes forever.

Led by the five girls—Baby arm-in-arm with Melisse, Sally and her sister on each side of Sadie, the mournful procession left the house.

The coffin was borne on the shoulders of six strong sailors, and behind it followed a firing-party with Ridgewood in command.

At the grave Melisse knelt, and ere the coffin was lowered, repeated a prayer and a part of the burial service of her creed from memory.

Then, reverently, the coffin was lowered, while the girls, sobbing, stood alone. Every sound seemed like a knell to the weeping daughters, but they knew it had to be—and they bore up as best they could.

After the grave was filled, under Ridgewood's orders, a soldier's honor, three rounds of musketry were fired over the grave.

One of the carpenters, a good carver, cut through the rough bark of the tree a large cross and over it two crossed swords.

It signified to a thoughtful passer-by—"Here lies the body of a Christian who bravely died in battle."

Returning to the house, preparations had to be made at once for the boats to return.

The three orphans clung to our heroines with a love born of their bereavement, and not until young Ridgewood promised to return with his sister and Melisse at some future time could they reconcile themselves to the parting.

They were asked indeed to go to Baltimore to live lives of ease and comfort with the Ridgewoods—but they would not go away from their dear father's grave.

They followed the girls to the boat, and, weeping, kissed them a sad farewell. They stood on the wharf as long as the boat could be seen, and then went back to their desolate home to weep over a loss that was irreparable—the loss of a parent whose words had been notes of kindness and music to their souls from their infancy to his death, who never, by word or deed, threw a shadow over their young lives.

With a will the gallant man-of-war's-men bent to their oars on the return to their vessel.

They knew how proud their young commander would feel when he saw the rescued ladies and knew that in all its glorious fullness the mission he had been sent out on was complete—that the pirate, Fire Feather, who had been the terror of the Southern seas and had chilled with fear many a Northern heart, had met the fate he

merited—his band extinguished, his blood-stained ship destroyed, and that they had added new glory to the service of their choice and done credit to the country they loved.

And they saw a new light in their young pilot's face which had so long been stern and sad, as he sat with his fair sister and his beautiful love by his side.

CHAPTER XLVII.

CHEERS.

BEFORE Barney Buglin, the light-house-keeper, had reached the revenue-cutter in the boat which was sent for him, the humane old captain had caused the woman to be brought up from among the wounded men below to his own cabin.

She lay on a comfortable cot, with a strong light falling on her pale face, when Barney was brought in. Forgetting all her errors, remembering only that she was his wife, his own Colleen, he gave her face one glance and rushed forward weeping to embrace her.

Gently the surgeons held him back and told him the least excitement would be fatal, that even then life trembled in the shadow of death and chances were hardly even that she could be saved, a cripple if she was.

"My Colleen—my darlint, my poor wife!" he sobbed.

"Don't sp'ake to me, Barney dear, I'm not worth it," she whispered, touched to the heart by his grief.

"Yis, ye are! Ye are all I've got, Colleen, an' if we've had hard words now an' thin, I was the most at fault!"

"Not so—Barney dear. The devil has been in me, an' now I've got me desarts! I think I'm kilt intirely, but the docters say I've a chance yit for it."

"To be sure ye have—live for yer own ould Barney that loves ye bether now nor ever he did afore. It's the throuble that wakes one up to know jist what he is!"

"But, hearken to me, Barney! They say I must be kept as I am and here under their doctorin' till I can be put in a hospital, and there I may lay for months afore I can git about even on crutches! And, Barney, I'd rather die wid you than I've you!"

"Ye sha'n't I've me, Colleen. These are revenue officers. I'll get them to put a man instid o' me in the tower an' give up my place. I've a little money laid up an' my pension of eight dollars to the month, an' I'll go wid ye and stick to you night an' day till you're well and as long afther that as I live!"

"Barney, ye are too good to me! If I do live I'll I've you a new life. I'll be bether nor I was when first we were married. I can't be more!"

"It is enough, Colleen; and now be 'asy, till I've got the captain to put a man in my place. The lights are all ready, lamps cl'ane and full and ready to light. Then I'll get our clothes and come till ye."

"Hist, Barney. I've a saycret. I've two purses full of gould in me pocket—it was given to me and pirates' gould, but there's none left to claim it. What shall I do wid it?"

"Kape it, Colleen, for you're sufferin' at its cost. Kape it, and in time to come it may serve to help us through!"

"I will, if you say it, Barney! But if you tould me to have it cast in the say, over it should go!"

"I'll tell you no such folly, Colleen. It has been a curse, but if we use it right it will turn to be a blessing!"

Loud cheers, heard from the decks of the Shark close by, reached the ears of all on board the cutter.

The boats sent up the bay were seen returning and the two rescued ladies were seen and recognized.

The cheers from the man-of-war were echoed by the crew of the cutter, and soon the cause was announced in the cabin.

"Praised be the Lord and all His howly saints for what I hear now!" said the wife of Barney. "I've not the sin o' their sorrow or death on my sowl. I'm thankful for all I suffer, so as they are safe at last. Since I've looked death in the face my heart was heavy for sorrow for the way I thr'ated thim! The Lord forgive me—I'd knale if I could an' crave them to pardon what I've done!"

"You must keep quiet, or you'll never get well!" said the doctor.

"I'll be 'asy as a suckin' lamb, yer honor, docther, dear. For I want to live now that Barney says he'll stay wid me!"

And the woman closed her eyes and moved her lips in prayer.

On the Shark, with her decks cleaned up and damages temporarily repaired as far as possible then, all was excitement when the boats were seen coming back, their errand a success.

Irrepressible and spontaneous cheers broke from every lip on board without regard to rank or station.

The sides were lined with the brave crew and

officers. Even the wounded crept up from below to welcome the ladies who had been rescued unharmed from the terrible fate which had impended over them.

And they were handed over the side by the chivalric Chandler with a courtesy that almost made them forget their late sufferings.

And in his cabin, to their wonder, they found the dresses they had cast aside when they started from the pirate schooner to swim for life and liberty. They hurried to resume their garments, glad to look like themselves once more, and to feel that they were at least presentable when the officers were allowed to come in to pay their respects and to offer their congratulations.

Captain Coste and his officers donned full uniforms, to show their respect, and were profuse in expressions of joy that the ladies after all their perils were safe and free from any ill, but the suffering consequent upon their abduction and cruel detention.

As the cutter was in trim for sailing, her spars and sails being now intact, Lieutenant Chandler asked Captain Coste to make all sail for Baltimore with the happy news.

He would follow as fast as a rather shaky mainmast with three round shot in it, and a fished fore-yard that had lost one arm, would allow.

He would carry our heroines to their home in his own vessel, knowing the commander of the station would allow him almost any liberty in consequence of the distinguished service he had performed so rapidly and so well.

Captain Coste was only too happy to have the chance to be the first bearer of the glad news, and hurrying back, as soon as he sent a man to fill Barney Buglin's place, he made sail for the City of Monuments.

The crew of the Shark were busied for some time in making repairs to spars and sails, and while this was being done, Ridgewood had permission to send up a boat-load of stores and provisions to the orphans of Zeb Snooks, for the ladies knew they would not for a long time feel like doing much to help themselves, and that they would sadly miss the provident care of their good father.

The girls could not write their thanks, but they sent a verbal message of gratitude by the officer who had charge of the boat.

Six hours later than the cutter, the Shark headed out around Hatteras, though the cutter had taken the inside passage safe under the pilotage of Captain Coste.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

WELCOME HOME.

As I think I have, or ought to have said before—joy never kills, no matter how much it may agitate.

When the Campbell came to in her old anchorage off Baltimore, Captain Coste did not wait for the furling of her sails, but had his boat lowered and in it he hurried on shore.

His duty was to make his first report to the collector of the port. But he let duty "slide" and first hurried to the old Ridgewood mansion and rung the bell.

To the servant he said:

"Tell Mrs. Ridgewood I would see her instantly. I have good news for her!"

His card accompanied the message.

In less than a minute the lady herself was at the door, both hands extended, asking him into her parlor.

"From my son?" she gasped—"is the news from my dear son?"

And she trembled so she had to sink into a chair to keep from falling.

"From both son and daughter, well and happy—they will greet you in person in a few hours!"

"My God—on my knees I thank thee!" she said, solemnly, and she knelt weeping for joy by her chair.

The captain sat silent; he dared not break the spell in which her reverent gratitude to Him "who giveth and who taketh away" was rendered.

When she rose, in reply to her questions he briefly spoke of the action in which both vessels bore a part, described the rescue of the young ladies, and left "the bill of particulars," as lawyers would call it, to be filled out by her children when they arrived.

Then he hurried off to report to the collector and to face newspaper reporters—terrible ordeal that last—while Mrs. Ridgewood hurried to gently break the glad news to the good Monsieur Dupré.

That gentleman, fortunately, was having his wound dressed, and the surgeon was there to offer aid if the news overcame him.

But the instant he saw the face of Mrs. Ridgewood, he said:

"Madame—you have heard from our children. I read it in your eyes!"

"I have—they are all alive and well, and on their way home!"

"When—when—" he gasped.

He did not hear her answer though she said:

"In a few hours."

He had fainted dead away.

The surgeon was cool and unexcitable. He had a stimulant ready, and in a very short time, through proper treatment, M. Dupré was conscious.

Cautioning him that he must be quiet or he would not be able to see his child when she did come, the surgeon gave him a soporific and left him to sleep until she arrived.

From the collector's office the news spread over the city rapidly. And the whole town seemed to wake to sudden joy. Bells were rung, crowds gathering about the bulletin-boards at the newspaper offices made the streets ring with their cheers.

The hotels were illuminated and every police station was a blaze of light because the authors of the late terrible outrage had been so signally punished.

But the next morning, when the United States schooner Shark was signaled as approaching the harbor, the excitement culminated.

Salutes were fired, colors flew from every ship in the harbor—every flag-staff on shore.

The mayor and council turned out in a body in carriages to receive our heroines and their brave rescuers when they landed, and amid the thunder of cannon, the pealing of bells and the glad shouts of multitudes, they were welcomed back as those saved from the grasp and the shadow of death.

Escorted to their home, the ladies were left to the tender love which there awaited them, while the heroes of the hour received every honor which could be heaped upon them.

Docked at the expense of the city, the Shark was made as good as new, while officers and crew enjoyed the freedom of the city.

Reporting to his commanding officer, and through him to the secretary of the navy, Lieutenant Chandler detailed the incidents of his brief but eventful cruise and by the return mail received the commending approval of both.

In any country but this promotion, not thanks, would have been his reward.

The brave lieutenant in his report did not forget to give Captain Coste every credit for his skill, good judgment and valor, and to say that it was through him that the pirate was found and brought to bay. Also that in the action he did his part bravely and was supported nobly by officers and crew.

And now, drawing to a close, we have only a few of our characters to place *en rapport* with the reader, ere we lay down our pen.

Colleen Buglin, carefully nursed by her "ould man," honest Barney, grew rapidly convalescent in the hospital, but though lamed and partially paralyzed, there was enough of her left, as Barney said, to make them both happy.

With the pirate gold they set up a small thread and needle store, to which Barney added the sale of newspapers, tobacco and cigars, and added to instead of using up the store, which thus became a blessing where it had been a curse. So much for them.

Lieutenant Chandler soon became a full commander, but he clung to the gallant Shark and her noble officers and crew instead of taking a sloop-of-war with his new rank, which came only in the regular line of promotion.

Captain Coste clung to the Campbell, for he had been in her so long he could not feel at home out of her.

The good Father Dupré, sent for by his brother, got another priest to attend to his mission for the winter, and came a passenger in Captain Odell's last voyage of the mail packet for the season.

His special mission to Baltimore was to unite his niece Melisse to Edward Marvel Ridgewood in the holy bonds of matrimony.

Commander Chandler was best-man on the occasion, and Sadie, lovely as the loveliest, was bridesmaid.

It was whispered, and the commander blushed acknowledgment when he heard it, that Miss Sadie would soon enter into the ship Chandlery line with a marriage-certificate as her share of stock.

Then, Mr. Ridgewood having purchased a stanch yacht, it was announced that a joint bridal-trip would be taken, and as a portion of it, the yacht under competent pilotage would visit Hatteras Inlet and the three orphans on Rescue Island, as Sadie insisted the island which the Snooks family owned should be called.

And in preparation for that visit a handsome monument was purchased by the two sisters.

The inscription read thus:

"ZEBULON SNOOKS—

a kind father, a devoted husband and a brave, true man, rests here. He died doing his duty, as he believed, to protect the helpless. In Heaven rest his soul."

That is all, and our story of love and war, crime and its punishment, is at an

END.

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